A JEWISH FEMINIST CONFRONTS GERMANY

LILITH

THE JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE #21 $3.50 FALL 1988/5749

New Ceremonies for:

urning 12
urning 60
in Between

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THE WOMEN'S GALLERY

Evelyn Rosenberg combines the techniques of printmaking and mold-making with the science of explosives. She has named the result "detonography."

Her process begins by drawing in detail the image that will eventually be a sculpture. She creates a plaster mold which is taken to the blast site and covered with a rubber buffer sheet. When the explosion occurs, the mold is destroyed, but the force of the explosion has left the mold's every imprint on the metal like a "giant stamping press."

Her sculptures, created with sheets of stainless steel, brass, copper or aluminum, are filled with images of animals, plants and women. Her varied background includes a degree in comparative religion at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a stay in India and an M.F.A. from Columbia University in New York. She now teaches a course in detonography at the New Mexico Institute for Mining and Technology in Albuquerque.

Rosenberg says that she is excited by the "philosophical idea of using the power of destructive forces for creative and positive purposes. Like Genesis, the big bang, destruction can be healing."

– Jessica Schulte

Fall 1988/5749

THE PREPARED TABLE*

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LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: *"After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said, 'We are equal because we both come from the earth.'"* (from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)*

**THE PREPARED TABLE* takes its title from the English translation of *Shulchan Aruch,* which has long served as the authoritative code of Jewish behavior according to *halacha* (Jewish law). As Jewish feminists continue to rediscover and rework tradition, custom and practice, a new egalitarian Prepared Table will emerge. We list here selections from this evolving Prepared Table.

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FROM THE EDITOR

When LILITH published its first issue in 1976, the premise behind many of the articles was the need for Jewish women to define themselves – how to be who we *were*, and who we could become, not who others wanted us to be.

We talked then about equal access for women in all areas of Jewish life. When we spoke of the Jewish community we meant getting women into positions of power and responsibility in existing organizations. When we spoke about prayer, we meant women being called to the Torah in traditional synagogues and women rabbis leading services from traditional pulpits with congregants in traditional pews.

When in our second issue we published excerpts from a prayerbook where God was referred to as female, we felt we were raising people's consciousness dramatically. After reading those Shabbat prayers then, and finding myself uncomfortable referring to God as "She," I realized that the lesson – for me, at least – was that I should be (needed to be) equally uncomfortable with an exclusively *masculine* formulation for God.

The Friday evening after I read an early version of the interview we've printed here between Rabbi Susan Schnur and feminist poet and liturgist Marcia Falk, and Marcia's newly formulated blessings, I choked and stumbled over the traditional "Hamotzi." I went back to read again Marcia's reframing of the blessing over the bread, and sang it out loud. For days the new words in the traditional tune stayed with me – along with several questions about the methods and implications of altering traditional texts authentically.

With the current issue #21 LILITH achieves its majority, and the way we look at Jewish women's issues ripened.

We are entering a new era – not just the arbitrary opportunity for refocusing that the approaching end-of-decade year seems to demand. More than that. With LILITH's earlier issues, we made the case for opening up Jewish institutions to women – Federations, community power bases, religious hierarchies. Some of this has happened, though not enough. And we as women have moved on, past the closed doors and into a meadow of our own. The articles in these pages on spirituality and on politics all point to a future in which what women want makes a difference. Not merely equal access or equal opportunity. A whole new look at the world from an egalitarian perspective. A world in which individuals see themselves as empowered to make change – whether in reaching out to women of other backgrounds or in political representation or in the ways we choose to address Holiness.

We want to have a chance at repairing the world – from a Jewish women's perspective. A world in which women's perceptions and experiences will have value, recognition, power.

In this issue we welcome to the masthead Rabbi Susan Schnur as Special Projects Editor.

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LINES OF COMMUNICATION

FROM MY TZEDAKAH BOX

To the Editor:
I emptied my tzedakah box this month and decided to send it to LILITH. You seem to be coming more regularly now. Congratulations. I have always loved the magazine.

Eleanor Kretzer
North Hollywood CA

ABUSE IN JEWISH FAMILIES

To the Editor:
We were pleased to see LILITH [#20] address the serious issue of wife abuse in the Jewish family. It is important to debunk the myth that Jewish men do not beat their wives, and we were happy to be listed as a resource.

We must, however, comment on several parts of the article. First, Toby Myers is a member of the board of Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), here in Houston, and the director of PIVOT, AVDA's counseling program for batterers. She is not a California resident, nor, as far as we know, is there an AVDA in California or anywhere else. Second, although Dr. Myers is quoted correctly, the attributes in the article are misleading. Those who have worked in the battered women's movement for a long time, including Dr. Myers, believe the safety of battered women must be considered first and foremost, including shelter, counseling, and legal advocacy.

Finally, we are concerned by Marcia Cohn Spiegel's comment that those who have been abused reach out to change the world, to do *teshuvah*, which is translated to mean repentance. "Repentance" indicates that the victim was to blame for the abuse. If *teshuvah* is correctly translated, we would suggest it is an inappropriate term to attribute to battered women who want to help others.

Rhonda Gerson
Toby Myers
Houston

CONSIDERING THE BIRTH MOTHER

To the Editor:
Adoption is not a simple solution that solves the problem of infertility. [See LILITH #19] It is the irrevocable transference of a child that permanently affects the lives of not just the adopters, but also the child who will grow into an adult; the birth family; grandparents, both adoptive and by birth; siblings, both adoptive and by birth; etc. For many of these people, adoption adds joy to their lives. For others, it adds pain.

Rabbi Michael Gold states that adoption is a mitzvah. Yes, adoption as it was practiced in the past — finding homes for homeless children — is a mitzvah. But one can only wonder if adoption as it is practiced today — finding children for childless couples — is really a mitzvah.

If the goal of adoption is to help homeless children, why then are there 36,000 children awaiting adoption in this country? If the goal is to stave off hunger in far-off lands, why do we not send food, clothing or money? If the goal is to provide help for women experiencing untimely pregnancies, then why do we not provide them with the services they and their children need to remain together as a family?

Next to world peace and world hunger, there is nothing else I can think of that is more important than saving the American Jewish family. By continuing to encourage young women to postpone childbearing, to abort, or adopt-out untimely, unplanned pregnancies, are we solving problems or creating new ones?

Perhaps we need to reevaluate values. Parenting is life's most difficult, most challenging, most rewarding and most worthwhile profession.

Marsha Riben
Old Bridge NJ

Editor's note: Marsha Riben is the author of shedding light on ... The Dark Side of Adoption *(Detroit: Harlo, 1988).*

ISRAEL CORRECTED

To the Editor:
Congratulations on the Summer 1988 edition of LILITH [#20], which was even more attractive than your earlier numbers.

Of course, time overtakes any periodical. Both Leah Shakdiel and the women on the Tel Aviv municipality have won their law suits, but much still remains to be done here.

Permit me to point out some errors in two of the sections in your invaluable "57 Reasons to Get in Touch" item: in "Government", you list the address of the Council of Women's Organizations as the Prime Minister's Office. In fact it is 1 Mapu Street, Jerusalem. The member organizations of this body are Na'amat, WIZO, Emunah, Association of University Women, Soroptimist, B'nai B'rith and the Liberal Party Women's Division. Under "General" you refer to the Forum of Women's Organizations as the "most inclusive of all umbrella organizations". In fact, only seven groups collaborate in this Forum. The term "umbrella" organization, so far as one exists, applies to the Forum of Heads of Women's Organizations, set up at the beginning of 1988 by Etya Simcha, the Prime Minister's Advisor on Women's Status. An unprecedented number of members — 27 heads of organizations — makes this a very significant forum, potentially an important source of networking.

Keep up the good work!

Alice Shalvi
Jerusalem

To the Editor:
We're astounded that PEF Israel Endowment Funds isn't included in the section on Israeli women's groups in the Summer 1988 LILITH [#20] received today.

We cannot understand why LILITH omits the *only* charitable organization to which tax-deductible contributions may be made with a recommendation that it be used for *any* tax-exempt, non-profit women's group in Israel. The two organizations listed *[U.S.-Israel Women-to-Women and the New Israel Fund — Ed.]*, which do fine work, assist only specified groups.

Lydia Feinsod Herz
Roger J. Herz
New York City

CHANA'S MISSION

To the Editor:
Your article on Chana Senesh [LILITH #20] was very meaningful, as in this country we tend to admire only those who achieve a successful mission. We ignore the sweat and blood that is part of the endeavor.

It might interest you to know that the former grounds of the parachute jumping and commando training is now the campus of the University of Haifa. In those days there were no buildings in the surrounding area; that was wild and remote, and a well kept secret by the British Army. A friend of mine, Patrick Leigh Fermor, was stationed there before his assignment to parachute behind enemy lines in Crete. He too, was captured by the Nazis and reported killed, only to emerge some time later alive and well. One wonders if men were given better training than women.

Adina Etkes
Los Angeles

KOL ISHAH—"WOMAN'S VOICE." TRADITIONALLY, THE VOICE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN WAS NOT TO BE HEARD IN PUBLIC, LEST IT AROUSE MEN. NO MORE. THESE PAGES ARE FOR NEWS ABOUT JEWISH WOMEN, USUALLY IN THEIR OWN STRONG VOICES.

KOL ISHAH

Miami Herald

Bonnie Fedderman

'JAP'-BAITING, cont'd.

A Coral Springs, Florida boutique named PAJ ("JAP" spelled backwards) has found itself at the center of controversy involving its name and marketing techniques. The store advertises "'JAP'-Dollars" and some of the store's merchandise is emblazoned "Jewish American Princess" or "JAP Country Club."

Several rabbis and prominent local community leaders have spoken to owner Barbara Fedderman and her male partner in an attempt to have them change the store name. Fedderman has refused, claiming that she is "proud to be a Jewish princess" and meant no offense by the name or her marketing campaign.

Coral Springs is more than 70 percent non-Jewish and has a recent history of anti-Jewish cults in the local high school.

And in yet another example of how devastating the "JAP" stereotype can be, Villard Books recently published *Death of a "Jewish American Princess": The True Story of a Victim on Trial* by Shirley Frondorf. The book details the trial of Steven Steinberg, who was charged with murdering his wife, Elana, in 1981. His defense was that his wife was a "JAP", and that he was driven to violence by her excessive shopping sprees.

The Phoenix restauranteur claimed to be sleepwalking at the time he killed his wife by stabbing her 26 times. Incredibly, the jurors accepted this as a reasonable explanation for his action, and acquitted him.

— **Deborah Fuller Hahn**

RABBIS BACK RULING AGAINST SURROGATE MOTHERS

Rabbis participating on the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law have supported that panel's recommendations regarding surrogate motherhood.

The task force, which issued its report in June, did not call for a total ban on surrogacy arrangements, but said that the practice of paying women to serve as surrogate mothers "has the potential to undermine the dignity of women, children and human reproduction." In cases of disputes, the task force recommended that custody always be awarded to the mother, unless there is "clear and convincing evidence" that awarding custody to the father would be in the child's best interest.

RABBI SEEKS TO BAN WOMEN FROM ISRAELI RADIO

Rabbi Simha Meron, who was recently appointed to the plenum of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, is seeking to ban women from religiously-oriented television programs to conform with the *halachic* (legal) stricture against men listening to women singing.

Rabbi Meron, legal advisor to the Shas party, is the first ultra-Orthodox representative to the broadcasting authority. He said that he did not know how much influence he would have in his new position, but he will try to pressure the various bodies within the authority to give more consideration to programs projecting Jewish "traditional and cultural values."

DRESS IS REMINDER OF HOLOCAUST

Peter Goldberg

Holocaust survivor Frania Bratt Blum has donated a dress she made in Dachau to A Living Memorial to the Holocaust-Museum of Jewish Heritage. She made the dress when the camp was liberated in 1945, using fabric brought to inmates by their American liberators.

Blum designed the dress in a peasant-style that she had admired when growing up in Poland. For years, she would wear it on special occasions to commemorate the day of her liberation.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage, which will be located at Battery Park City in Manhattan, is expected to open in November 1990.

— **Toby Axelrod**

CANADIAN WOMEN PUBLISH SOVIET REFUSENIK POETRY

The Jewish Women's Federation of Toronto, an umbrella for 20,000 women, has launched an intensive campaign for the release of Leningrad refusenik Elena Keis and her family. The federation has produced a small pamphlet of Keis' poetry, translated into English, and entitled "Believe me, Sister." The poems deal with her feelings toward "refusal" and "separation" from her family in Israel, and have never been published before in the West.

Wendy Litwack

Refusenik Elena Keis and her son Andrei.

UNIVERSITY CENSURED FOR FEMINIST'S DISMISSAL

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has censured the University of Judaism in Santa Monica, California, for its dismissal of feminist poet and liturgist Marcia Falk.

An associate professor at the small Conservative university since 1984, Falk was up for tenure consideration at the time of her dismissal. She had been teaching courses in literature and creative writing.

The association sharply criticized the secrecy surrounding Falk's review. Contrary to AAUP guidelines and those of the university itself, Falk was never told the names of the professors who reviewed her work, nor was she ever given a proper chance to respond to the report's contents before her tenure application was denied.

According to Jordan Kurland, associate general secretary of the AAUP, the university's anonymous review committee prepared a "highly negative report" on Falk for the university's president, despite the fact that six outside individual referees consulted by the anonymous committee had written "very highly of her published work and strongly supported her candidacy for advancement."

The AAUP report stated, "One has difficulty recognizing that the letters and the report are discussing the same publications and the same person."

Falk says, "The AAUP report got it exactly right. I'm really concerned with the future of women and feminists in Jewish institutions."

The university has called the AAUP claims "distorted and unfair," but on the advice of its lawyers has declined to comment further.

Censure, which lasts at least until the AAUP's next annual meeting in June 1989, can hurt a school's reputation, said Kurland.

Falk is noted for her translations of the Hebrew Bible and for her feminist-oriented liturgy [see pp. 10-15], and the AAUP surmised that the university did not want a professor with her strong convictions on the faculty.

Falk, charging sex discrimination, is suing the university for $5 million. The American Civil Liberties Union has "committed to being involved in the case."

JEWISH WOMEN GAMBLE TOO

Elaine Goldman (a pseudonym) is a 31-year-old college-educated Jewish woman who comes from a wealthy, high-profile family in Westchester County, just north of New York City. Within the last three years, she lost $73,000, passed bad checks, borrowed money illegally from loan sharks, alienated her family, became a pathological liar and almost destroyed her entire world.

"She became an obsessive gambler," says Linda Berman, coordinator of the Compulsive Gamblers program at Westchester (NY) Jewish Community Services (WJCS).

Confronted by her family and by school officials who said she was neglecting her children, Elaine finally agreed to get help. In three months of counselling at WJCS, she stopped gambling, and now is trying to put her life back together.

Elaine isn't the only Jewish woman who has almost gambled her life away. In fact, Jews are overrepresented in the gambling population, according to Berman, a psychiatric social worker.

"The numbers have substantially increased in the last five years. Women have more funds available to them today, including credit cards, loans, money they make on their own," says Berman. "Years ago gambling was male dominated. Now casinos make it more comfortable and accepted for women."

She added that women are more vulnerable than men. "I call it the 'Vanna White Syndome'. They watch 'Wheel of Fortune' on television and they want to win something for nothing. They want to escape their difficult situations and forget reality."

The WJCS program counsels gamblers and their families in group and individual therapy, and coordinates efforts with Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon. "The best thing you can do for compulsive gamblers is to confront them," Berman says. "Tell them that compulsive gambling is a treatable disease and let them know there's a place they can go to get help."

– Susan Shapiro

(Continued on Page 32)

OBITUARIES

Frances Z. Green, 91, who worked for several pioneering social service agencies, died in Holyoke, Massachusetts this past April.

She had worked for the National Child Labor Committee, the American Public Housing Conference, the Joint Distribution Committee and the American Jewish Committee, where she was business and then general manager of *Commentary* magazine from its inception in 1945 until 1963. She worked at *Current* until her retirement in 1970.

Green was born in Lithuania and grew up in Hartford, Connecticut. She attended New York University.

9 Issues for the 90's

As we move into and out of the U.S. elections, certain issues emerge as the chief contenders for the political energies of Jewish women in the decade to come.

The 1990s are almost upon us. Will women have an impact on Middle East politics? Will we have a viable child care system? How will AIDS affect our culture? These and other questions are plaguing our legislators, and they should be plaguing us.

As Jewish feminists, we must bring our own special sensibilities and knowledge to these issues, as well as the weight of any organizations to which we belong. To make clear how we might best do that, LILITH has asked experts on these issues exactly what is happening, and how we might confront the issues.

by Sara Nelson

From the film "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo"

Human Rights

It is easy for us in the United States to ignore human rights abuses against other Jews simply because so much of what is happening in places like Syria and Ethiopia doesn't make the front pages of our newspapers. And ironically, the very publicity that might help to repair these violations against them runs the risk of endangering them further. "It is a touchy thing," says Helen Scoville of Amnesty International.

It is also a dilemma we've encountered before – in the plight of Soviet Jews – but it appears that making noise *has* helped in the case of the Soviets. Lynn Singer of the Long Island Coalition for Soviet Jewry calls several Soviet Jewish women everyday. She suggests that concerned women "adopt" a Russian refusenik family. "Get the name of a refusenik and write to her. Even if you never get an answer, keep writing."

Singer notes that *Perestroika*, as Gorbachev proscribes it, is not particularly good for the Jews, and she sees a backlash coming. "If the economic restructuring [that Gorbachev proposes] takes place, sixteen million people will be thrown out of work. What kind of backlash do you suppose there will be then?" she asks.

Publicity has not helped in countries like Ethiopia and Syria. In Syria, for example, the estimated 4,500 to 4,800 Jews are "in effect a hostage community," says George E. Gruen, the director of Middle East Affairs for the American Jewish Committee. The horrors committed against them include interrogation in secret detention centers, torture and mutilation (four young Jewish women who tried to flee Syria were returned to their families dead in sacks), and forced marriages to non-Jews.

In Ethiopia, more than 30 Jews have been illegally detained since February 1987; many of these are believed to have been tortured.

So far our main weapon has been economic. Still, Amnesty International suggests that we might send "courteous telegrams and letters to the Ethiopian authorities" expressing our concern at the arrests and reported torture.

For more information, contact Amnesty International, 322 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10001; Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry, 1 Old Country Road, Carle Place, NY 11514; American Association for Ethiopian Jewry, 2789 Oak, Highland Park, IL.

Courtesy The New York Public Library

The Environment

Judaism has always put great emphasis on the land and its fruits and in this nuclear age we cannot overvalue the importance of our environment.

"We have tried to find a way to blend concern over nuclear war with images from the Bible," says Arthur Waskow, director of the Shalom Project in Philadelphia. "Because Pesach is a holiday that celebrates our deliverance from the Pharoahs, we conducted a seder at a nuclear test site in the desert, in order to emphasize our wish to be delivered from this horror as well."

"We need to raise people's consciousness about the environment," says Ellen Bernstein, who is organizing a Jewish environmental group in Philadelphia and has written a special *haggadah* to be used for *Tu B'shvat* (holiday of the trees) seders. By juxtaposing *Torah* readings with environmental readings and poetry, we hope to educate Jews about the environment in which we live."

Bernstein believes that "many of our environmental problems have to do with waste on a personal level." She hopes to remind Jews that *Tu B'shvat*, which generally falls in February, is a kind of Jewish Earth Day. "My hope is that each year we can focus on a different aspect of the environment," she says.

Contact Bernstein at 529 Carpenter Lane, Philadelphia, 19119.

Health

For a while, it seemed that the issue was settled. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade established that women had the right to an abortion, and as a corollary, the right to control their own bodies. This was a major victory for feminism.

But times are changing. The celebrated "Baby M" Case, in which a "surrogate" mother in New Jersey decided she could not give up her birth daughter, suddenly reopened the question of reproductive rights.

In her book, *Sacred Bond: The Legacy of Baby M*, (New York: Times Books, 1988) Phyllis Chesler, writes that surrogacy, in fact any form of 'coerced' adoption (which includes most 'normal' adoptions), is degrading to women. She states that any adoption in which a birth mother is "counseled" to give up her child is a "forced" adoption and should therefore be outlawed; only the adoptions of children willingly abandoned by their birth mothers should be allowed.

Many feminists agree with Chesler, at least in part. In the now famous "We are all unfit mothers" letter; signed by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Nora Ephron and Meryl Streep among many others; American feminists indicated their support for Mary Beth Whitehead, the New Jersey surrogate mother.

The New Jersey Supreme Court eventually declared the Whitehead surrogacy illegal. And Chesler writes: "My involvement as an organizer in the campaign against surrogacy is over. The larger campaign for women's reproductive and custodial rights must continue."

Contact an office of National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) near you, or contact your local National Organization for Women (NOW) for the names of organizations in your area.

"Until very recently, the mainstream Jewish organizations have done almost nothing to help people with AIDS," says Saul Zalkin of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, New York's first gay and lesbian synagogue. "Only now are they starting. But they must do more."

The Jewish Board of Family and Children Services in New York has a

Layle Silbert

Courtesy Na'amat

"chicken soup brigade" to bring food to homebound AIDS victims. This organization also offers counseling to victims and their families.

"We're fighting the myths, though," says Zalkin. "The myths that Jews are not gay, that they don't use drugs, that they don't get this 'kind of disease.'"

Jewish women do participate as volunteers at many AIDS crisis centers, but, says Zalkin, those Jewish volunteers might work for their synagogue or community center AIDS groups if such groups existed. Concerned women should call their local community centers and their rabbis to talk about setting up outreach, counseling and support programs.

Education

The good news about Jewish education is that more and more women are becoming rabbis – "an unprecedented number," says Elaine Cohen, the acting director of the Jewish Teacher Training Program at McGill University. The bad news is that at the lower levels – in elementary and secondary schools – the quality of Jewish education is low because teachers are not given the resources or the incentives to be strong teachers.

This is the problem that all educators face: how to make teaching an attractive profession. "We need to make teaching a serious choice for people. We need to raise the status of teachers," Cohen says, by paying teachers more, offering sabbaticals and by encouraging respect for teachers in general and Jewish teachers in particular.

In addition, she notes, we must address the question of the quality of the Jewish education we provide. "The challenge is not only to educate boy and girl children equally but to give the girls a sense of what they can do with that education." We also need to give or continue Jewish eduction for adults. "We need to have parents with a strong Jewish knowledge and identity so they can be role models for their kids," Cohen concludes.

For more information, contact the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), 468 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016; the Melton Institute, Jewish Theological Seminary, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027.

Child Care

"One of the greatest misconceptions we have," says Lois Roisman of the Jewish Fund for Justice, "is that daycare for children is a problem for poor people." We also need to find a way to provide daycare to the middle class. "There are tremendous problems in raising children in a time of wealth. I call it affluenza. It would be nice to deal with this in a Jewish context."

"Child care used to be considered a frill," says May Newburger, formerly a New York State Assembly representative. "But it requires universal attention." Child care is particularly important for Jews, Newburger claims, because more and more young Jewish families are two-career couples, and she fears that without adequate, affordable child care, these couples may put off or limit the number of children they have.

"The Jewish family has always been at the heart of Judaism," she says. Daycare is an opportunity for people to identify Jewishly instead of waiting until the child is *bar-mitzvah*. "If we want to sustain the family, we have to provide aid to these young parents."

Daycare money will need to come, in large part, from government, and Jewish women can do a lot to see that the support is provided. "It seems to me that this is an issue that requires two things," Newburger says. "One: talk – to

Debbi Cooper

egislators in an election year, and two: action — support of existing centers, support of legislators who support child care."

Contact The Jewish Child Care Association, 575 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10022.

Hunger, Poverty & the Homeless

n 1982, two Atlanta synagogues opened their doors to the homeless of that city, providing places for them to sleep. Within a few years, they were sponsoring Passover seders for the homeless.

But shelters and seders are only part of the answer, says Rona Schpeiser, assistant director of Jewish Family Services there. The community must start addressing the underlying problems of homelessness — poverty, drug addiction, joblessness. Whether or not the homeless on our streets were born and raised Jewish, we have an obligation to help them because as Jews we know what it is to be without a homeland and a home.

In an effort to help, the Jewish Fund for Justice makes grants to groups working with lower-income women. These groups may provide shelters for the homeless, continuing education, job training and even daycare to poor women who would work if only they had someone with whom to leave their children.

"For many years, the homeless population was primarily male and elderly," says Sara Peller of Project Dorot in New York. "Now there is a younger female population that is homeless. What we are fighting for is accessible, safe housing with accessible services," Peller says. "Many of the homeless are that way because they have no one to advocate for them."

Contact the Jewish Fund for Justice, 1725 K St. NW, Washington, DC 20006.

Peace in the Middle East

Before Arabs and Jews in Israel can put down their weapons, they must learn to talk to each other, to understand. That's the philosophy of a number of politically aware and active women — both Jewish and Arab — in Israel. To this end, some activist women have set up discussion groups for Israeli and Palestinian women in both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

"We find we have the same concerns," says Chaya Shalom, a fifth generation Jewish Israeli woman who lives in Tel Aviv. "We talk about our children growing up in such a tense, war-torn place; we talk about how we reorganize our lives while our husbands are in prison or under curfew. We've been having these discussions since December 1987, and are finding that neither group is like the stereotype we've been taught about."

Shalom believes the route to peace lies in women. "We run the daily life," she says, and while others, like Sharon Shenhav, the director of Legal Services for Na'amat agree, they both acknowledge there are problems with this approach. "Some Palestinian women will say that their needs as women and their family's needs comes second to the needs of the state," says Shalom.

Still, Na'amat has found a novel approach for uniting Jewish and Palestinian women. The organization's first activity when it enters an Arab community is to set up daycare centers. This becomes a place for women to meet when they come to drop off or pick up their kids," Shenhav says. "It helps to form a community."

In addition, some Israeli women have formed Women in Black, a group

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RESHAPING PRAYER: AN INTERVIEW WITH MARCIA FALK

BY SUSAN SCHNUR

Feminists have, for years, skirred gingerly around the edges of Jewish prayer, changing a word here ("forefathers" to "and foremothers"), a word there ("Lord" to "Shekhina"), but otherwise leaving the traditional texts intact. More recently, some feminists have abandoned the traditional prayers altogether, creating new ones from scratch or borrowing from non-Jewish sources. Marcia Falk, however, chooses neither of these approaches. Rather, she roundly takes the patriarchal liturgy by the trunk, shakes off its dirt, prunes it violently and lovingly back, does the necessary grafts, and, in the re-planting, she creates – magically – entire new species. She is both radical and conservation-minded; courageous and ecological.

Generally, new liturgies de-fenestrate themselves in dimestore ways: hokey neologisms; bourgeois awkwardnesses; language that is overwrought, overly-privatized, self-conscious, banal; sentiments that range from the fuzzy to the false. Falk, however, throws nothing out the window that isn't already dead. There is no smoke in her spare-as-a-haiku prayers and services; all of us can reach the burning bush. I mean, the burning bush*es*. For, there are, of course, more than one.

Marcia Falk is visiting associate professor of religious studies at Stanford University. She is the author of several books of poetry and translations, including *This Year in Jerusalem* (Brockport, NY: State Street Press, 1986); *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1982); *Am I Also You?* (translations from the Yiddish of Malka Heifitz Tussman, Berkeley, CA: Tree Books, 1977); and *The Spectacular Difference* (translations from the Hebrew of Zelda, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, forthcoming, 1988). She is now writing *The Book of Blessings: A Feminist-Jewish Reconstruction of Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, forthcoming, 1989).

SUSAN SCHNUR: Marcia, the quotes by the architect Mies van der Rohe –"less is more" and "God is in the details" – make me think of your work, not only because I think of you as a fastidious writer, but because I think of you as an architect, too – an architect of time.

I also think of you in relation to the feminist theologian Mary Daly's quote: "The work of fostering religious consciousness which is explicitly incompatible with sexism will require an extraordinary degree of creative rage, love and hope." Your example of this has meant so much to me – to a lot of us – because you've given us the permission to be bold ourselves, to stick to our visions, to feel entitled to make changes. A lot of us thank you for this.

Give us – if you can – a developmental sense of yourself and your work.

FALK: I grew up in a Conservative Jewish home on Long Island, where we went to *shul* [synagogue] every week. I was always conscious in a positive way of being Jewish. I had two loves in my childhood: First, I fell in love with Hebrew at a very young age. I was very deeply moved by Hebrew poetry. Second, the Art Students League – which is right across the street from where we're sitting now – is where I took art lessons on Saturdays as a kid. I would go to *shul* in the morning and then take the bus and subway into Manhattan and paint all afternoon. [Jewish law prohibits painting on the Sabbath.] To this day I thank my parents for their wisdom in not depriving me of painting, which would have turned me off to Judaism.

But then I went away to Camp Ramah, and I came back and decided to be *halachic* [observant of Jewish

law]. I did not go to the Art Students League for a whole year. And I was so miserable. At the end of that year, I was really at a crisis. I remember talking to one of my uncles, who said, "Religion's not supposed to make you miserable." I went back to the Art Students League.

So even early on, I had to find a way to reconcile my religion with my creativity. The spiritual meaning in my life was coming through painting. Being Jewish had to do with feeling my "place" in the world — but I couldn't really feel "in place" if I wasn't also an artist.

The blessings that I write today, for example, emerge from inside me the way that poems or paintings do. They're not "political" work; they're gifts of my *neshamah* [soul]. They let me tell the truth in my language.

SCHNUR: When did you start writing poetry?

FALK: I began as a child, continued through adolescence, then stopped in college — I went to Brandeis — where I was a philosophy major. But I returned to poetry in graduate school — Stanford — where I studied English and Comparative Literature. I was supposed to be studying the great "Judeo-Christian" tradition, which, at the time — 1968 — was essentially the literature of white, Christian men. This was very disappointing to me. I came back to feeling myself as a Jewish woman. I started studying American women poets. And then — this is the part that every time I tell this story, I feel the forces of mystery operating — it was like some old song from childhood rose to the surface of my consciousness, and I realized that I needed to study the *Song of Songs*. I don't know where that came from. In 1970, I did my first translations of the *Song of Songs*. That was the most important project in my life, prior to the work I'm now doing on liturgy, and, in addition, it returned me to writing my own poetry. With the *Song of Songs*, I started reintegrating all the parts of myself that had been kept separate. There was myself as a Jew, myself as a woman. *Song of Songs*, as you know, is the only text in the Bible in which we really hear from women more than from men. I sense there that women's thoughts and speech are not filtered through a male voice, through male experience. I think that the *Song of Songs* was originally folk poetry, composed in community. It expresses a pre-sexist vision. It's a remnant of something earlier than other books in the Bible; it's a pre-patriarchal text. Don't you feel the difference? It's a very surprising little text — so sensual, so connected. Not just female and male, but human and the rest of creation, the natural world, the celebration of the body in wonderfully free ways, the mutual relationship between body and soul. And, of course, there is no God in the *Song of Songs*, which makes it unique.

SCHNUR: How did you begin working on the next project, your new blessings?

FALK: In 1978, my father died, and I started — for the first time — to ask basic questions about God, about death, about the meaning of life. I was in Israel when my father died, and I flew to New York for his funeral, and spent a month home with my mother. I hung out in *minyans* [prayer groups] on the Upper West Side, and I tried to talk to people about God. No one wanted to talk about God. I realized then that God was our most taboo subject.

In 1980, I went off to an artists' colony for the summer with the idea that I was going to translate a sequence of psalms as my next project. But I kept getting stuck. The way in which I had been able to make the *Song of Songs* come alive in my own voice, I wasn't able to do for the psalms. I kept coming up against the same hard place: the Lord God King of the Universe. Here were these wonderful passages where the rivers were applauding and the mountains were singing — and then there'd be the Lord God King of the Universe presiding over it all. It was a real boulder for me; I couldn't get beyond it. But I didn't have the language to articulate exactly what the problem was, yet.

Then in 1981, a group formed called B'not Eysh [Daughters of Fire]. It was 24 women from around the country who came together for five days to talk about our feelings as Jews about spirituality. I began to give myself permission to be uncomfortable with the words in the Hebrew prayerbook, words that I understood only too well. Why was everything in the masculine? So back home in synagogue, I would stand up for the *Amidah* prayer and I would translate the whole thing into the feminine. And of course, it would take me twice as long to finish the *Amidah* as anybody else, and suddenly I was standing after the whole congregation was sitting. That was very symbolic — because I was no longer a part of the *tsibur* [congregation]. But I persisted, because I was traditional. And at one point — and I can't even tell you what point it was — I realized that I couldn't say those words at all anymore.

The next significant event was at a Havurah Institute in 1983 when Art Waskow asked me if I would create *kavvanot* [meditations] for the *brachot* [blessings] of the *Havdalah* [ceremony for the end of the Sabbath]. I said, "No." And he said, "What do you mean, 'no?' Why no?" And I said, "I don't say those *brachot* anymore." That was the first time I admitted that, even to myself. And he said, "So say your own *brachot!*" Of course, I didn't admit to Art that I didn't have my own *brachot*. I had 24 hours to come up with my own *brachot*.

SCHNUR: What did you come up with?

FALK: What hit me very powerfully — instead of *"Baruch atah adonai"* [Blessed are You, Lord] — was to substitute *"Nevarech"* ["Let us bless"]. Not *"Bruchah at"* ["Blessed are You" in the feminine], because I wanted to be inclusive, and the only person that's

Illustrations by Tia Stoller and Sandra Kunz. Reprinted with permission from *Womanspirit Sourcebook* by Patrice Wynne (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988)

inclusive in the Hebrew is the first person.

The next question was — *Nevarech* what? And what came to me at that stage was *m'kor ha-chayyim* [the source of life]. I came up with *"Nevarech et m'kor ha-chayyim"* ["Let us bless the source of life"] as the opening phrase of those first blessings. I no longer remember exactly how those blessings ended, but probably they were pretty close to the original Hebrew blessings. That was my first real breakthrough in writing feminist Hebrew prayer.

SCHNUR: Were you excited?

FALK: I was very excited. In the ensuing year, I started to experiment more. I searched for grammatically feminine images, so that I could start hearing language in the feminine. I started reading Biblical texts again. My love of the landscape of Israel came back to me very powerfully. Landscape is always very important to me. And at some point, the grammatically feminine image of *eyn ha-chayyim* [fountain or wellspring of life] evolved. As soon as I got it, I realized that it was right. It pointed towards divinity which didn't come *down* from above, but which *welled up* from under.

Then in the fall of 1984, I gave a talk at a conference in Los Angeles called "Illuminating the Unwritten Scrolls: Women's Spirituality and Jewish Tradition." That was when I created my first wholly new blessing: *"Nevarech et eyn ha-chayyim / matzmichat pri hagafen / venishzor et serigei chayyenu / b'masoret ha-am"* ("Let us bless the wellspring of life / that ripens fruit on the vines / as we weave the branches of our lives / into the tradition"). It was intended to celebrate new holidays for women.

SCHNUR: Talk to me a little about your theology.

FALK: I feel very moved along by feminist spirituality from a lot of different traditions. My own theology evolves with practice — with the practice of writing and using new liturgy. I experiment a lot. I choose my metaphors to point towards divinity from all aspects of creation — not just the human realm. Because I think the biggest danger right now is the survival of the planet, and I think that our "speciesism" — our elevating of our human species above all other species — is dangerous. It's important to get beyond using only human images for God or Goddess. I would also like to get beyond assigning immanence to Goddess and transcendence to God, because I think that's the old patriarchal dualism — immanence as female, transcendence as male. We have to ask, are there ways in which we can still speak about transcendence helpfully?

SCHNUR: Are there?

FALK: Well, there's the idea of transcendence with mutality. That is, you and I are transcending right now by talking to each other. I'm going beyond myself to talk to you and to listen to you, and you are going beyond yourself to talk and listen to me. But the problem is that when transcendence is a one-way thing, where you have a hierarchical dualism and God is not just out there but up there and we're down here, it's entirely different.

We have such a terrible imbalance in our theological language — transcendence is overwhelmingly dominant. So the first thing I'm interested in doing is finding more images of immanence. See, I'm much more interested in images than concepts! My deep belief is that we should not have any single image for an all-inclusive concept like monotheism. The only way to express monotheism — which I see as the ultimate, embracing unity of reality — is to have a multiplicity of images, as many as we need to express the diversity of our lives.

Monotheism in the vulgar sense in which it's often understood — which is to say, the head dude in the pantheon is the real God — that's not the monotheism I'm interested in. But I think the monotheism that Jewish feminists are trying to reclaim today is extremely profound. For me, it has to do with the fact that ultimately I am more like you than I am unlike you, that we are part of the same creation, the same source. Of course, in feminist spirituality, there are many different languages, metaphor systems. I'm interested in speaking through a Jewish metaphor system, through a Jewish language.

SCHNUR: But, as you know, you've got detractors within Judaism who would claim that what you're doing is *not* Jewish.

FALK: Why should I let *them* define what Judaism is and place myself outside of it? I use Jewish sources, Jewish language, Jewish experience. I call myself a Jew.

SCHNUR: There are a lot of us who feel as you do, but many of us feel lonely and isolated.

FALK: I have a fantasy of creating the Feminist Institute of Life and Learning, where all of us are gathered together in one place. And we really live our lives — with a kind of integrity that radiates out into the world and changes the world. But we're in close enough contact that we're continually resources for each other.

I am very much moved by any women's authentic journey. Buddhist women. Goddess women. I learned about silence as a resource from a Christian woman who said, "Silence is an aesthetic self-indulgence, because in silence everything reverberates. You're polishing a floor in silence, and you really experience the shine on the floor."

SCHNUR: Do you think Judaism uses silence as this kind of resource?

FALK: Not enough. One of the things I did when I created a Friday evening *Amidah* for the new Reconstructionist prayerbook was to analyze the themes of the traditional seven sections. I created a three-part collage for each theme: poetry, *brachah* [blessing], and *kavvanah* [meditation]. But when I got to the section on gratitude, I realized that what I wanted there was not more words, but silence. And I wrote it in. I mean, I wrote in blank space, because, visually, words indicate noise and white space means silence. By silence I don't mean what we call, in traditional services, "silent reading" — when you mumble the words, don't say them quite out loud. I mean, *no words*, just silence, and let what happens happen.

Part of life that Judaism does not seem to emphasize is receptivity, the "wait and see" approach. Buber says, "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware" — a line I love — but there's a feminist hymn by Ruth Duck that says, "The journey is our home," which goes even beyond Buber's statement.

As a child and a teenager, I wanted more of this, more silence in prayer, more time to let my own words, my own thoughts and feelings happen. I

Blessings for the Meal

by Marcia Falk

Kiddush for New Festivals

N'varekh et eyn ha-hayyim
matzmihat p'ri ha-gafen
v'nishzor et s'rigey hayyeynu
b'massoret ha-am.

Let us bless the source of life
that ripens fruit on the vine
as we weave the branches of our lives
into the tradition.

נברך את עין החיים
מצמיחת פרי הגפן
ונשזור את סריגי חיינו
במסרת העם.

נטילת ידיים
Washing the Hands

Tizkor nafshenu et k'dushat ha-guf
bintilat yadayim.

Washing the hands, we call to mind
the holiness of the body

תזכור נפשנו את קדושת הגוף
בנטילת ידיים.

המוציאה
Blessing over Bread

N'varekh et eyn ha-hayyim
ha-motziah lehem min ha-aretz.

Let us bless the source of life
that brings forth bread from the earth.

נברך את עין החיים
המוציאה לחם מן הארץ.

ברכת המזון
Blessing after the Meal

Nodeh l'eyn ha-hayyim
al ha-aretz v'al ha-mazon:
nishmor al ha-aretz
v'hi t'kayy'menu,
un'vakkesh mazon la-sova
l'khol yoshvey tevel.

Let us acknowledge the source of life
for the earth and for nourishment.
May we conserve the earth
that it may sustain us,
and let us seek sustenance
for all who inhabit the world.

נודה לעין החיים
על הארץ ועל המזון:
נשמור על הארץ
והיא תקיימנו
ונבקש מזון לשובע
לכל יושבי תבל.

Marcia Falk explains her *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (Blessing After the Meal):

In the opening two lines of my *berakhah*, *"Nodeh le'ein ha-hayyim / al ha-aretz ve'al ha-mazon"* ("Let us acknowledge the source of life / for the earth and for nourishment"), the word *"aretz"* refers to "earth" as the whole of creation. In the context of the traditional *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, the phrase *"al ha-aretz ve'al ha-mazon"* refers to *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel. By using this phrase in a new context, I intend to preserve a particularist resonance within a universal statement.

In the second two lines of my *berakhah*, *"nishmor al ha-aretz / vehi tekayemenu"* ("may we conserve the earth / that it may sustain us"), I refer again to the earth as planet, stressing our responsibility to live in harmony with the eco-system.

In the final two lines, *"unevakesh mazon lasova / lekhol yoshvei tevel"* ("and let us seek sustenance / for all who inhabit the world"), I affirm a commitment to seek a just distribution of the world's food resources.

Thus my *berakhah* has a three-fold focus: gratitude to the deep and mysterious source of all being; human partnership with the source to further the life of the creation, in the mode of ecological responsibility; and commitment to pursue a just world by ending world hunger. While I believe that these three focal points are firmly rooted in Jewish values and traditions, their ramifications and implications are nothing if not universal. My intent is to intertwine the particular and the universal, to apply Jewish teaching to our living as Jews in the whole of the world.

One of the things that feminism has done so profoundly is affirm our particularities in the context of our great commonalities. In my *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, I have given special attention to this relationship.

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experienced distrust, among my teachers and camp counselors, of young people as individuals. They were afraid to let us be ourselves in prayer, afraid to let us be alone. But this lack of trust in individuals can only hurt the community. The community has to be fed by authentic individuals, and community only exists when individuals are validated. It has to be a back and forth thing.

SCHNUR: I have a question about living with the contradictions, feeling alienated by the traditional texts. Not long ago, it struck me that nearly every Biblical story felt odd to me in some way. For example, the creation story, which is very hierarchical and speciesist and has humans "subduing" the earth – this is not a creation story I would have written. Or, say, the *akedah* [Abraham's binding of his son Isaac]. I'm interested in an astonishingly different trip: the one that Sarah and her daughter took. Or even the most basic notion of covenant, which has a strong *quid pro quo* quality: God did this for us, and so we do this back for Him – though I appreciate its historical function. So my question is: At what point can we simply not open the book anymore? What happens *after* we reclaim Shifra or Vashti?

FALK: You know the saying about Torah –"Turn it over, turn it over, because everything is in it"? Well, everything is *not* in it. And at the same time, it's very hard for me to cut myself adrift from Torah entirely. It has had profound influence; it represents where we've come from. I think that everything that has ever emerged for me in my life has emerged out of some tension, some creative tension.

SCHNUR: You know Starhawk's version of the *Sh'ma* – "Listen, people, the universe is a song of multiple harmonies and voices." That's pretty different from "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." What do you do with the *Sh'ma?*

FALK: I like what Starhawk does. I do something similar: I reinterpret the basic theme of unity to embrace the diversity and wholeness and integrity of creation.

SCHNUR: But, I mean, the *Sh'ma* is our central prayer. Doesn't it unnerve you not to use it?

FALK: I think I *am* using it.

SCHNUR: Tell me what it means to you to have a feminist critique.

FALK: If I had to reduce it to a few words, I would say it's a deep suspicion of hierarchy and a constant questioning of authority. For me, feminism has been a lot about listening, about "hearing each other into speech," to use a phrase of the feminist theologian Nelle Morton. In my classroom, for example, I encourage my students to listen to each other and to trust themselves, rather than constantly looking to authority figures for their answers. The whole structure of academic institutions, in general, is hierarchical, with everything that that means: wisdom and knowledge coming from outside in. For me, the whole process of feminist education has to do with getting in touch with the truth that wisdom comes from within.

SCHNUR: Does this insight relate to your theology?

FALK: I think it's extremely important that we take back the power that is really ours but which we have disguised as residing someplace else. The power of naming is *our* power; the power of metaphor-making is *our* power. The power of human consciousness resides within us. I think that we have to start seeing ourselves in relation to the planet much more as adults and less as children, because, in fact, as a species we are responsible for having brought the planet to this terrible brink. And if as a species we don't claim our adulthood and our responsibility to repair the planet, we may just see it go up in smoke.

SCHNUR: Some people equate this adulthood with arrogance – that, for example, *"Nevarech"* [Let us bless] instead of *"Baruch atah"* [Blessed are You] lacks humility.

FALK: I think this phenomenon is similar to the child who hasn't sufficiently separated from her or his parent, and is afraid. As a people, we're on a journey and we've been stuck in a childhood relationship with a parental God figure, but we can't afford to be there anymore. Far from being arrogance, what this means is taking responsibility, so that we can really deeply celebrate divinity. Which is a better gift to your parent? To fulfill your own life and to care for the lives around you which are dependent on you, or to remain in constant dependency? The sick parent will prefer the latter, but that's not my notion of divinity; I don't want a sick parent for God.

SCHNUR: Let me ask you a question about prayer and physical space. I've always wanted synagogues to have gardens, grottos, courtyards – magic places that offer an intuition of ties to the earth. What's your feeling about prayer-space?

FALK: I think that the way we structure space is extremely important. I think that aesthetics is very important. And I think that a little glimpse of what's beyond the window is extremely important. For example, I can't teach in a classroom that has no windows – it's too insular. In a windowless room, how can you make deep connections with the world you live in?

And the same thing is true for the synagogue. A synagogue needs space and light, but, you know, darkness is also a great resource.

Another thing that's important is direction. One of the things that's terribly wrong with the traditional American synagogue is that all eyes face forward to the rabbi and cantor on the *bimah* [podium]. Now in Havurah-style *davvening* [praying], which takes place in a circle, you're able to face the community. But there's something else too, even beyond that. Sometimes, you need not to be looking at other faces at all, but into blank space. It would be nice to have that little grotto that you talked about as a resting place for the eye.

SCHNUR: Does feminist spirituality have a different understanding of finitude and death, of control, change, of death not as an enemy but as implicit in life?

FALK: Let me tell you about creating one of the blessings for my new *Amidah*. The original version of the *Amidah* praises God for reviving the dead. Traditionally, this is understood as an apocalyptic experience that happens after the messiah comes. It's interesting to me that so few changes have been made in the liturgy by either the Reform or the Reconstructionist movement, yet this particular phrase bothered both movements enough to make them change it. Rather than speak of God who revives the dead [*"m'chayyei ha-meitim"*], they praise a God who revives everything [*"m'chayyei ha-kol"*], thereby eliminating any explicit mention of death.

I looked at the phrase *"m'chayyei ha-meitim"* anew when I was trying to create my own version of the *Amidah*. And I said: Here's the one moment in this whole long prayer that directly addresses death. I don't want to kick out the word "death" here. On the contrary, I want to take this seriously. It struck me that the original Hebrew context joined life and death in a relationship, and that this relationship still has meaning. For everything that lives, dies. And everything that dies returns to the earth to be born again into new life. We need a way to affirm and embrace this process. And so, the section I created for this part of the *Amidah* is made of poems having to do with death and our relationship to our living through our mortality. I felt that celebration of mortality was a kind of healing.

SCHNUR: What you are saying reminds me of other feminist writers. Susan Griffin, for example, re-writes Plato's cave without the dualism, without the mind/body split, without the idea that we see only shadows, live a second-class life. She has us simply *being* the cave! In the same way that I see myself not *saying* a prayer, but trying to *be* a prayer.

FALK: Beautiful, what both of you are saying.

I really wish you were in the same community with me. You know?

SCHNUR: I know. ❑

***Susan Schnur**, LILITH's Special Projects Editor, is a writer and rabbi.*

GO AND STUDY

Here is a very partial and eclectic "starter's list" for help in creating rituals or in setting up a *Rosh Hodesh* group.

Resource Centers

Jewish Women's Resource Center: A project of the National Council of Jewish Women: New York Section. 9 E. 69th Street, New York, NY 10021, (212)535-5900. Alicia Driks, who runs this center, says, "We can mail you packets of life cycle ceremonies like baby namings, weaning and menstruation prayers, feminist hagadahs, reaffirmations-of-marriage ceremonies."

P'nai Or Religious Fellowhip of Philadelphia. 6723 Emlen Street, Philadelphia, PA 19119, (215)849-5385. The fellowship is publishing a new Shabbat morning *siddur* in June 1990. Prayers to be done in couples (in addition to the usual full-group and solitary praying) suggests that "emotional relationships can ease and encourage different forms of prayer." There are guided meditations and dance notations.

Books

Motherprayer by Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Boston: Beacon Press). Due out in 1989, Frymer-Kensky describes it as "readings, prayers and rituals toward a theology of birth."

Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year by Penina V. Adelman (New York: Biblio Press, 1986). ***The Book of Blessings: A Feminist-Jewish Reconstruction of Prayer*** by Marcia Falk (San Francisco: Harper & Row). Due out in 1989.

And the following titles from the Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education. 4079 54th Street, San Diego, CA 92105, (619)442-2666:

Midlife, A Rite of Passage and ***The Wise Woman, A Celebration*** by Irene Fine. The first, a ceremony for women between 35 - 55 years old; the second, for elders.

Educating the New Jewish Woman: A Dynamic Approach by Irene Fine. Includes a feminist paradigm for creating new rituals.

Women Speak To God: The Prayers and Poems of Jewish Women by Marcia Cohn Spiegel and Deborah Lipton Kremsdorf.

On our Spiritual Journey: A Creative Shabbat Service edited by Jacquelyn Tolley.

Taking The Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible edited by Jane Sprague Zones, due out Fall 1989.

Women as Resources

Elana Schachter, 303 Glen Echo Road, Philadelphia, PA 19119. "I'm happy to help anyone create ritual, compose personal prayer, or form a *Rosh Hodesh* group. I'm especially interested in helping women redeem Biblical texts that alienate us."

Julie Greenberg, Room B202, 6445 Greene Street, Philadelphia, PA 19119. Julie is "a willing contact person to help people write new rituals, and to find out how to set up spiritual feminist retreats."

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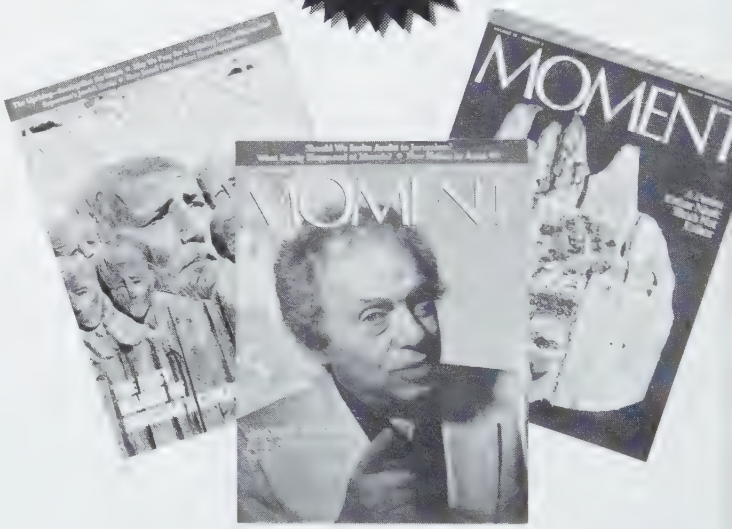

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TURNING 12:
A MENARCHE CEREMONY

by Judith Chalmer and Fran Solin

Rosh Hodesh (New Moon) groups have been real catalysts for change among Jewish women across the U.S. Consisting, generally, of between six to twenty women, these groups meet monthly in living rooms, backyards, around woodstoves, on beaches, and in synagogues.

Historically, in traditional Judaism, *Rosh Hodesh* was a semi-holiday. During Biblical times, sacrifices were offered. For women, specifically, it was a day of rest during which time we refrained from traditional distaff tasks like weaving, spinning, and wick-making. We lit candles, had parties, wore new clothes, and took up collections for *tzedaka* (charity).

Today, *Rosh Hodesh* groups are the spawning grounds for new liturgies and previously unaddressed life cycle occasions. New ceremonies include those for weaning, menopause, becoming a resident in a nursing home, croning (becoming an elder), divorce, fledging children from home to college, birth, miscarriage, even losing one's virginity. The following ceremony, from Montpelier, Vermont, is for menarche (getting one's first period).

At our tiny *shul* (synagogue), Hannah Solin Famiglietti, age 12, agreed to be honored at a ceremony that marked the onset of her menses. Fifteen women – we'd been meeting to observe Rosh Hodesh as a festival for women for two years – sat in a circle on the white rug of the synagogue sanctuary. We are all closer to Hannah's mother's age than to Hannah's age. It was the beginning of spring, Rosh Hodesh Nisan, the month of Passover.

Leader: "To begin this month we recall the time when our bodies first began marking the months. We honor the *simcha* (joyous occasion) menarche, and welcome our sister/daughter, Hannah, to womanhood. As we each light a candle we will tell in turn the stories of our own first menstruations."

Twenty to 30 years after our own first menses, we are nearly doubled over with laughter as we recall – in spectacular contrast – the pain of our original embarrassment and confusion.

After each woman tells her story and receives a blessing – *"Brucha at haShechina"* – we sing a song for our newest member:

Bruchot haba'ot tachat kanfey haShechina. May you be blessed beneath the wings of Shechina. Be blessed with love, be blessed with peace (song by Debbie Friedman).

"I Got My Period at Pizza Hut"

Here are Hannah's own reflections upon her ceremony:

First, I thought I didn't want to do it, but then I said yes because they were my mother's friends, not people I see every day. It couldn't hurt. Also, I like surprises, though I wasn't exactly sure if I was going to like this one! I like having attention, too, but I don't like to admit this to people.

At first, I was terrified. I said, "Mom, I can't do this" – it was a bigger group than I'd expected. But then, well, I liked everyone's stories about their own first menstruations. I got comfortable and started talking.

I got my period at Pizza Hut. But menstruation, at my school, was a big secret, and no one talked about it. During the ceremony, I started talking all about this.

As the ceremony was ending, I got really happy. I felt I belonged somewhere that nobody could ever take away from me. I felt I had done something right. I was proud of myself. I felt I had done something good for me, and also for the other people there. I had let the grown women go back to their childhoods; they seemed like different people to me then – not so old and sophisticated.

What I didn't like was the part of the ceremony where we smeared the clay. It was cold and your face shriveled up. It was very weird. Everyone was laughing; it was kind of corny. I felt badly, also, that I couldn't include my father in any of this. He works with kids and he's good with kids. I felt like I was leaving him out.

All in all, the ceremony didn't just center on me: we all shared, we sat in a circle. I felt a part of things, not just singled out as me.

I tutor eight to ten-year olds at the Hebrew school, and I couldn't actually suggest to the girls to do what I did – but I can suggest that my mother talk to their mothers. Maybe some of them will choose to do this.

The tambourine I was given with all the women's colored ribbons on it is hanging above my bed. I really like it.

Leader: "In Nisan we remember how Miriam the Prophet, after the Hebrews' escape from Egypt across the Red Sea, led the women in a dance of celebration with tambourines."

The mother of the *maidele* (young girl) of honor holds up a crescent shaped tambourine which she has decorated with symbols and inscriptions including moons, *Magen David* (Star of David), the date (Nisan 1, 5748), her daughter's name, and the words: "Miriam took her timbrel out" (Exodus 15:20). The tambourine is passed around the circle. As each woman holds it she attaches a streamer and tells Hannah of a blessing that she individually has received as a Jewish woman. The blessings take the form of *dayenu* (it would be enough).

Example:

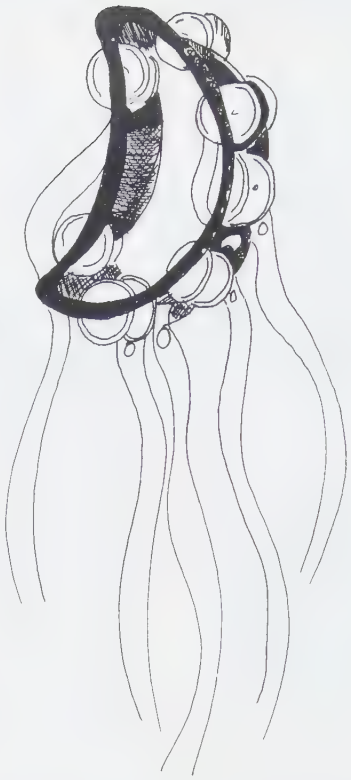
If I had been blessed to have ovulated and menstruated, it would have been enough. But I have also dipped in the waters of a *mikvah* (ritual bath)!

All sing *dayenu.*

If I had been blessed to have given birth, it would have been enough. But I also have sustained my child with the milk of my breasts!

All sing *dayenu.*

If I had been blessed to have loved a man and raised children, it would have been enough. But



Doris Reich

then I loved a woman and learned that all kinds of love are good!

All sing *dayenu.*

After the last *dayenu*, the tambourine is given to Hannah, who leads the group in dancing to *"Mayim, mayim."*

Leader: "No longer will our blood be hidden as an embarrassment. We are proud to acknowledge the sign of our connection with the mysteries of life and death."

Hannah's mother takes a bowl of softened red clay, dips in her finger, and streaks her daughter's face, saying, "Even the hidden parts of you are beautiful."

Hannah recites: *"Baruch atah adonay, elohenu melech ha-olam sheh assani ishah.* Blessed are you, holy One of being, Mother and Father of us all, who has created me female." She then takes the bowl, dips in her finger, and streaks the face of the next woman, continuing the assurance given and blessing received around the circle.

We end with a blessing for wine (taken from a menarche ceremony described in the November/December 1985 issue of *Menorah*): *Brucha at, haShechina, makoret hachayim, borayt pri hagafen.* Blessed are you, *Shechina*, source of all life, who has made the fruits of the vine sweet to our taste in the familiar color of our life-giving blood.

All: *L'chayim* (To Life)! ❑

Judith Chalmer *is a freelance writer, mother of three sons in a traditional observant household, and a co-leader of* Rosh Hodesh *celebrations in Montpelier, Vermont.*

Fran Solin *is a Jewish educator, mother of the maidele of honor, and a co-leader of* Rosh Hodesh *celebrations in Montpelier, Vermont.*

BECOMING A CRONE:

CEREMONY AT 60

Aging, our society tells us, is a nasty thing. And particularly nasty, of course, if you're a woman. In Marcia Cohn Spiegel's *Croning Ceremony,* however, the convention of denying the reality of death or of fearing growing old is stood on its head. Marty celebrated "becoming a crone" (that is, a wise old woman) at the age of 60, in the company of 120 others, in her Conservative synagogue, Congregation Ner Tamid, in Rolling Hills, California. As part of this *Ma'ariv/Havdala* (Saturday evening service), Marty donned her burial shroud (the one she will wear, eventually, forever), and she commented about that experience: "It was so moving to recognize that we are going to die, that living is a part of dying, and dying is a part of living. It's an exciting feeling of 'Watch the time, lady, it's running out!'"

As for the word crone itself, it is a recent feminist reclamation. The crone was not always portrayed as a shriveled, cold, bitter, old woman; on the contrary, in origin, she was a wise one, someone in menopause, a teacher and way-shower to others, someone who has gained much knowledge during her long journey through life, has consciously accepted loneliness, and who finally has the time to ponder seriously life's meaning.

In acknowledging our aging and our losses as Marty so directly does, we embrace, rather than barely tolerate, life processes. Thus, too, do we avoid the misogynist trappings that have dictated our lives. We reclaim ourselves, we celebrate that which we have become instead of mourning what we were.

Besides Marty Spiegel, three friends of hers — Drora Setel, Sue Levi Elwell, and Marcia Falk — participated. The following are excerpts:

Welcome

Marty: People always ask me what I'm going to do when I grow up. And it occurs to me that this is it. Whatever it is I'm going to be when I grow up, I am, now. [Audience laughs.] So, I have put together a service that I hope will be a model for other people to include in their own lives as they come to significant times of passage. Everything that I'm using this afternoon is symbolic to me. Those of you who are old enough to remember Gladys Avenue will recognize my mother's Spanish shawl that used to sit on the piano, and now is gracing our table for *Havdala*. Also, a lot of very special women helped me in planning this ceremony. And most of all: all of you here tonight. You are all the facets of my life! My children and grandchildren, my siblings, aunts and uncles and cousins, friends, friends of my children, neighbors, people I've worked with in the community, people I work with in the alcoholism program, people from my spiritual community, from my creativity group, poets, my publisher is here, my classmates are here, my students are here, my teachers are here, the people who have mentored me and the people whom I have mentored, people I have worked for and people I have worked with. Each of you has played a special part in my 60 years of life. And I welcome you.

[Song]: *Bruchot haba'ot. Tachat kanfey haShechina. Bruchim haba'im tachat kanfey haShechina.* May you be blessed beneath the wings of Shechina. Be blessed with love, be blessed with peace.

On Life

Marty: It's been a difficult six years in our family. It's okay if I cry. [She is crying, and continues to cry at intervals throughout.] We've had a lot of losses. And I have come to accept both the fragility of life and the treasure of good health. I've climbed Macchu Picchu, hiked into the Amazon jungle, and taken the train across Siberia. A lot of my friends said I was running away, but I wasn't. I was learning — about being alone, and that perhaps my way of mourning was to learn to live more intently. [Crying.] And I couldn't get away from it, because every place I went the dead went with me. Someone said about my husband, "You know, Sid would have loved this trip." And I said, "He would have hated it. He would've said, 'The room's too narrow. The bed's too short. Where is there a decent toilet?'" [She laughs.] I went around the world and saw the world with the eyes of the people who are lying at Mt. Sinai. It's been a time of integrating, of taking into myself the meaning of what life's all about.

A Healing Ceremony

Drora: When the Torah's open in the midst of community, there is a divine presence, a healing power. All who are in need of healing in their lives, please come join us in a circle. All of us have things that are not whole in our lives. And it is a healing of spirit as well as body. The *Shechina*, the divine spirit, has wings like the wings on the fringes of this *talit* (prayer shawl) that belonged to Marty's grandfather and that we will wrap around us now in this circle.

Marvin Stiendler

Under her grandfather's* tallit *(prayer shawl), Spiegel and friends say the prayer for healing.

[Song]: *Mi'sh'bayrach avotaynu makor habracha le'imataynu.* May the source of strength who blessed the ones before us help us to find courage to make our lives a blessing, and let us say Amen.

Donning the Kittel (Shroud)

Sue: A *kittel* is a traditional Jewish garment worn by a male at his wedding. He not only wore it at his wedding, a day of transformation and change, but also every year at the *Pesach* (Passover) seder, as he led his family in recounting the story of our going out from slavery to freedom, also on *Yom Kippur*, a day of different kinds of changes and of great solemnity, and finally he was buried in it.

We live in a time when we are blessed and cursed with choices, choices that lead to changes. We don special clothes. We choose new names. We redefine the boundaries of life and death. We redefine the boundaries of joy and sorrow. We redefine the boundaries of weakness and strength. It is our challenge to make choices that will become blessings. It is our challenge to make changes that will empower us in the world.

Marty: I put on this *kittel*. I'm 60. This is the *kittel* I will be buried in. I hope wisdom will come to me now. I figure I ought to get about 30 years of wear out of this *kittel* on joyous occasions, spiritual moments, but I also understand that in putting it on, I accept the inevitability of life.

Making Vows

Marty: As our ancestors made covenants, so too am I going to make a vow. First, I promise — in my professional capacity — to continue to try to empower people by exploring the dysfunctions within the Jewish family: battering, incest, alcoholism and drug abuse. Second, I'm going to make a vow for *tzedaka* (charity). Today's left-over food will be taken to a shelter for the homeless, and I will give a self-tax of three percent of the cost of this party to Mazon, which is an organization to help feed the hungry. And a continuing vow of *tzedaka* is to support financially as much as I can B'not Aish, the women's spiritual community to which I have belonged for five years. I am also going to plant a lemon tree in the garden. Traditionally, Jews plant trees at important life cycle events. Also, I need a lemon tree in my garden.

Taking A New Name

Marty: In the story of Sarah and Avraham at the time of the covenant, they were Sarai and Avram. And after the covenant, they became Sarah and Avraham. I decided for ceremonial purposes to take on the name of Miriam, because I never had a Hebrew name, just the Yiddish *Mushagoldeh*. I never thought I'd say that name in public. So when I am called up to the Torah in the future, I will be called up as *Miriam bat Hinda v'Avraham* (Miriam daughter of Hinda and Abraham).

Sue: We also celebrate here the bestowing of a title of honor on our elders, those who have lived and survived years of joy and pain. From them we can learn of love and loss and life. So I ask the elders to come up here. We bestow new titles on you: *chachamah* for a wise woman, and *chacham* for a wise man.

(They are blessed under Marty's grandmother's lace tablecloth.)

SHARING SACRED MOMENTS

We cast a wide, loose net and asked a good number of people this question: "Describe a moment in your life that you would call spiritual."

Only after we had the responses in hand did we recognize that we had, on some level, anticipated something quite different. Generally, we were imagining spirituality as something that stands up and stretches after a long nap. Our spiritual sherpas, however, felt otherwise. Even *while* napping, they seem to suggest, they stay spiritually on the *qui vive*. Their spirituality *is* life.

We also noted that an extremely high percentage of women wrote about giving or watching birth. (We were unable to include some of these answers here.) The frequency of this response does not necessarily argue (as one of our editors ruminated) that biology *is*, after all, destiny. It does, however, hint that biology informs one's sense of the sacred.

We noticed too that the kitchen is a favorite holy hot spot (after the out-of-doors). Any comments?

Photos by Barbara Gingold

Susan Weiner Reiman, storyteller, mother, poet, Princeton, NJ

The day we buried the goldfish in the backyard, my three-year-old son Jonathan and I put it in a brown-paper lunch bag, and as we started off across our half-acre backyard, I began to cry. I had lived in this house for one-and-one-half years and I had never put my hands in the dirt. I'd never even walked that far back on our property. Here my son was at the beginning of life and the goldfish was dead, and I hated the suburban development where I was living. I remembered when I was a kid and my mother flushed my goldfish down the toilet, and I didn't want my son to have that connection with death. (At times, I've felt like *I've* been flushed down the toilet, and I didn't want my son to have that connection with life, either.)

We dug a hole, and when I heard my son shoveling the dirt (what is that sound? thump? bang?) on some level it was that sound that I felt in my chest at my mother's funeral when I shoveled the dirt on her coffin.

My son said, "Why are you crying, Mommy?" And I said, "I miss my mother. This reminds me of the time when we buried my mother in the ground. You were only a baby then, so you don't remember her."

The thing was I had this little boy who was standing there holding my hand, you see, so it was life and death; whereas my mother's funeral had been death death death. I was also crying because I knew that my father-in-law had leukemia, and we'd be going to his funeral very soon. He was a Holocaust survivor and he was the ultimate grandfather. He was also very accepting of who I was; when I walked in a door, he was glad to see me.

After the fish was buried, the grass felt like grass instead of "lawn." I asked Jonathan, "Would you like to sing something?" and he sang "Row Row Row Your Boat."

Then I had him repeat after me the first four words of the *Kaddish* (Mourning Prayer): *"Yisgadal V'Yiskaddash Sh'may Rabbah,"* and I said, "This is what we said at my Mommy's funeral." Jonathan made a circle of stones. The next week we planted a flower there, but it died. I like knowing there's a goldfish buried at the back of the yard.

At the end of our funeral, I said to Jonathan. "Would you like to say anything to the goldfish?" There was some silence between us and I waited. Finally, he said, "Water."

Nina Beth Cardin, rabbi and seminary administrator, Teaneck, NJ

I last experienced a spiritual moment with my two-week-old daughter. The baby had been changed and fed, but she was still crying. It was nighttime, quiet and dark. My sons were asleep and my husband wasn't home. To comfort the baby, I took her in my arms and sat on our swing. We were swinging together. That's it. That's everything. It was nighttime, and quiet, and we were swinging.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, author and editor, New York City

My synagogue has two rabbis, a man and a woman, as well as a female cantor. During the High Holy Day season, the rabbis alternate between the "sanctuary service" and the "overflow service." This means that once on *Yom Kippur*, either on *Kol Nidre* or on the day of *Yom Kippur*, the congregation that worships in the main sanctuary is led by two women. When I see our female rabbi and cantor standing on the *bimah* (podium), leading us in prayer, I am thrilled and proud. It's almost like a physical soaring. That moment encompasses so many spiritual highs: personal, aesthetic, religious, High Holy Days, family, unity, the leadership of women. And these women are leading not only us women, but every member of the congregation — woman, man and child. After

so many years of being represented exclusively by men in my spiritual and communal life, it is awesome to be represented by women on the High Holy Days.

Chava Weissler, professor, Bethlehem, PA

In 1985, I went to see *Kever Rahel* [the tomb of the matriarch Rachel in Bethlehem, Israel]. When I entered the site of the monument, there were men and women standing on opposite sides of a cenotaph covered with blue velvet. Many of the Sephardic women there would go up to the velvet curtain and kiss it, as if greeting a respected and beloved older relative. When I approached the curtain, I found, to my astonishment, that I burst into tears. I backed away, and as I did, I regained my composure. Then I moved closer again to reexamine the site and the feelings it had stirred in me. Again, when I stood on the site of the grave, I burst into tears. Again, when I moved away, I stopped crying. These were not tears of sadness, but of reunion. This was someone I knew, someone to whom I could bring my troubles.

The *techinos* (Yiddish supplicatory prayers for and sometimes by women) that I am working on see Rachel as human and as *Shechina*, the female presence of God, but not as God per se. When I was at Rachel's grave, that distinction became less clear and less important than before. I only knew that this was a real female presence. I felt it so strongly that I wanted to offer a prayer and started to recite from the *Book of Psalms*. I quickly realized that I was speaking the wrong words in the wrong voice. The psalms were the *Psalms of David*. I needed to speak as a woman to a female aspect of God. In the end, I followed the Sephardic women's custom of encircling the cenotaph with a red thread. I wished there were words for

---

Merle Feld, poet, and playwright, Princeton, NJ

I never think of myself as waiting for you

I never think of myself as waiting for you
but then when the holiday has come and gone
when I'm packing up the Pesach dishes
or taking down the sukkah
I feel hopeless and alone

Inconsolable

Then I realize
I've left a small corner
somewhere deep inside myself
unpainted
And in that small corner
I'm still a child
a little girl
waiting

and I had hoped
without knowing it
that this *hag**
you'd come

My tears fall on the Pesach dishes
and I wonder
why you've left me here
alone

*holiday

The Israeli Woman.

In Israel, politics is a domain for Jewish men, right? Quite wrong: in fact, not only are there numerous women throughout the political echelon, including party leaders, but Arab women, such as Dr. Mariam Mar'i, have become involved in Israeli politics as well.

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me to say. I felt like there should be words.

Faye Moskowitz, author and professor, Washington, DC

Two widely spaced spiritual moments:

At eighteen, traveling alone, stripped of parents, siblings, friends, and teachers – my mirrors – I realized myself for the first time, a separate being, no longer a reflection, but the embodiment of spirit.

Short weeks ago, as I waited for a glimpse of my first grandchild, time seemed to elongate, to embrace me, my daughter, her daughter, the grandmother for whom the new little girl was to be named; I felt myself profoundly linked to the continuum of past, present, and future – still an individual, but shorn of mere mortality by connection to all that was and is and will be.

Janet Leuchter, Klezmer singer and voice teacher, New York City

Spirituality means maintaining a sense of humor when it's 11:00 p.m. and 90 degrees and your electricity has just died and your parents just happen to be visiting and you *really* need air conditioning. Spirituality means you are suffering from laryngitis just when you have to record something important. So you ask yourself, "What are my complaints compared to people I know who've lost parents, children, health, jobs, homes?" My most spiritual experiences come through seeing my voice students learn and change and through certain acts of *tzedaka* (charity).

Starhawk, writer, witch, peace activist, San Francisco

A single moment at 17. I was hitchhiking along the California coast, living in nature for the first time. There was a sense of everything around me being alive, a sense of feeling connected to the earth.

Fran Leibowitz, author, New York City

I have had no spiritual experiences. I think that such experiences are wishes, people's longing to feel something, their refusal to accept a certain emptiness, a certain randomness, a certain percentage of experience that can't be explained. People are groping, longing. I'm too old for that.

Debbie Friedman, composer and singer, Encino, CA

My confrontation with death and my acceptance of aloneness freed me to incorporate spiritual consciousnes into my life. For me, there is no separation between spirituality and living. Spirituality is at the core of all that is.

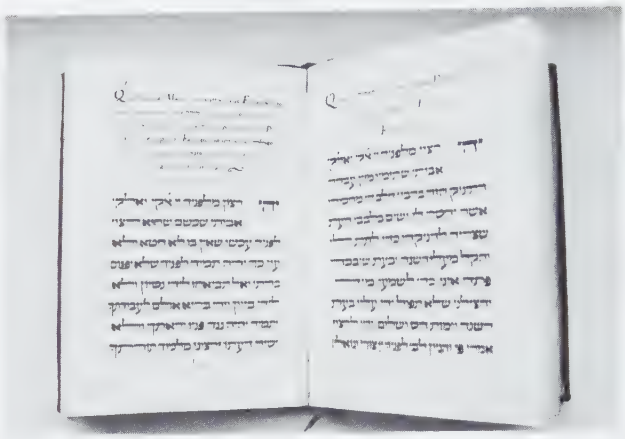
Amy Eilberg, rabbi, Pennsylvania Valley, PA

I am a regular *davener* – I pray every day. For the first two weeks of my daughter's life, I had the longest break from that daily habit that I've had in many years. I was exhausted, still recovering, and every minute that I was awake was spent in taking care of her. When I prayed for the first time after her birth, the prayer book tingled in my hand. Having spent every day in care-taking tasks, I found that it was a whole new *davening* experience. It was a whole new book.

Nahma Sandrow, author, playwright, professor, New York City

"Being grounded" is a phrase that I would use instead of spirituality. One of the great advantages to being born Jewish is that one doesn't have to agonize over trying to be on a particular plane of spirituality. Your life does it for you. It's in the mundane rather than in flight and height. It's not just rising up, but rather being anchored and structured. ❑

Compiled with the help of Jessica Schulte and Debra Orenstein.

A Woman's Prayer From the 18th Century

Marilynne Herbert

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, rare book manuscript #4371.

by Nina Beth Cardin

In 1786, Judith Kutscher Cohen of Italy received a gift from her husband: a 112-page prayer book compiled for "a married woman to be used especially during her pregnancy, labor and birth, and purification from her (monthly) impurity." The prayers in this *siddur* represent a genre of women's liturgy, written in Hebrew, centering on the home and the woman's role as wife and mother.

Not always immediately suitable for us today, these prayers nonetheless provide us with rare examples of women's spiritual life from over 200 years ago. Signora Kutscher Cohen's book is only one of several women's *siddurim* in the rare book collection of the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Here is the full text of a blessing for breast-feeding:

On Breast Feeding

May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that you provide for your gentle creation – plenty of milk, as much as she needs.

Give me the disposition and inclination to find the time to nurse her patiently till she be satisfied.

Cause me to sleep lightly so that the moment she cries I will hear her and respond.

Spare me the horror of accidentally laying upon my child and smothering her while I sleep, God forbid.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, my Rock and my Redeemer. (translated by Nina Beth Cardin)

Nina Beth Cardin, *a Conservative rabbi, is assistant to the vice chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary.*

TO BUDDHISM AND BACK

by Ilene Serlin

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At the age of 16, I left Judaism. For several years, I had been longing for a female model who was strong and spiritual, like Shiva or the Tantric goddesses; a model of someone who searches for meaning and whose life is disciplined and deliberate — like the Buddhist female warriors.

But all that I could find in Judaism — from the "Woman of Valor" in the *Book of Proverbs* (who "riseth while it is still night" to "delivereth girdles") to my mother's bridge playing friends in Great Neck — left me cold.

The Reform Judaism that I knew cultivated the mind, not the body — the latter being only something upon which to lavish too much food or clothing. As far as I could tell, there was no sense in Judaism that the body might have spiritual possibilities, might even be a temple. (In fact, the Orthodox men whom I knew, seemed almost to flaunt, with their shirts hanging out and their faces badly shaven, that to be spiritual meant to *neglect* the body.)

I yearned too for a religion that appreciated feminine ways of knowing which were grounded in eros: that is, in relationship, intuition, receptivity, and in all the emotions of the body. I loved silence, contemplation, and "being." But Judaism didn't help me here either. So I left.

I explored Tibetan Buddhism, anthropology, Jungian analysis, the goddess religions, modern dance. As a practicing Buddhist, I grew used to rooms which were sparse and clean. During one month-long sitting session of eight hours a day of meditation, I learned about silence, deliberateness and focus.

I suddenly felt new pangs, an inexplicable new yearning. I was homesick for my own tribe.

What a surprise then, that at age 30, I suddenly felt new pangs, an inexplicable new yearning. I was homesick for Judaism; for my own tribe, my own family, roots, people. I began to feel that claiming my Judaism was something about which I had no "choice". It was something *in* me, in my love of debate and complexity, for example, in my "style of neurosis", in my body, in the fact that Buddhism's coolness and remoteness were starting to make me nervous. Ironically, I felt homesick as well, because I'd never *been* home. That is, my childhood Judaism was the highly diluted suburban brand, not the "real thing" — so I needed to search through "outer answers" — gurus, countries, philosophies — to make the paradox hit me: that the answer was *within*. Within my own tradition; within myself.

The question became, then, how do I learn Judaism? As opposed to Buddhism, which has carefully schematized paths of introduction, Judaism seemed so inaccessible and complex.

When I looked in Judaism for what I had valued in Buddhism — simplicity, a basic belief in non-dualistic human goodness, being (rather than verbal explanation), letting go (rather than holding on), flexibility (rather than stability) — I couldn't find it.

I also had trouble with how crowded Judaism seemed. In Orthodox syn-

agogues which I visited on occasion, the children ran around amid a steady clack of mutterings and gossip. In frustration, I asked a rabbi I respected, "Where is the *silence* in Jewish mysticism?", and he answered meaningfully, "Jews have a *noisy* spirituality."

It was with those words ringing in my ears, finally, that I began to realize what I really needed: BOTH. Noise *and* silence, simplicity *and* complexity, letting go *and* memory, the coolness of Buddhism *and* the warmth of Judaism. I also knew that I absolutely had to find a spirituality of the body in Judaism, a celebration of the body through dance, a recognition of our bodies as sacred temples.

Around this time then, I had a watershed conversation with my great-aunt which reaffirmed for me that going back to Judaism was a matter of genes, an inheritance of the body. My Great-aunt Rae used to say to me, looking at me, that she recognized a certain expression in my eyes. She told me that her father had been the cantor of a Chassidic group in Russia. Singing and dancing were his primary means of expressing devotion. My great-aunt used to join him at these times. When I asked her what he taught her, she simply said that they shared a special communion which the "others did not have...he talked from the heart; he had a soul."

When I asked her how he meditated, she danced around the living room for me looking, at age 75 and under five feet tall, like a frisky satyr. Because of my relationship with her, I was able to see how my search for a spirituality which expressed "being moved" through the body and dance actually had roots in my own traditions and was inherited through the family!

Without having known about my own Jewish roots in dance and spirituality, I had nevertheless found my way into the relatively obscure profession of dance/movement therapy, and then to psychology. I was comfortable with the enormous expressive and communicative power of movement, with healing through body and psyche.

Slowly, I began to find in Judaism expressions of song, of dance, of healing, of the body, of joy – in the *Kabbala*, in Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, in the Baal Shem Tov, in the figure of Miriam the prophetess, in Jewish dancing and healing techniques as old as the Therapeutae (a Jewish sect who lived in the wilderness during the first century BCE), from the Bible and in Sephardic liturgical dances used during burial. I found images of nature in Bible that made sense to me as a dancer: expanding-contracting, scattering-gathering. I found images like weaving, the braided challah, Biblical dance motifs of braided vines, grapevine steps, basketweave handholds – an understanding of bringing together opposites, a peculiarly feminine mode of knowing.

Slowly, I began to find in Judaism expressions of song, of dance, of healing, of the body, of joy.

Finally, in 1986, during a conference which I helped organize in Los Angeles on women and spirituality, I experienced a final piece of "home-coming". The word *orphan* came up for many of us – over and over and over. Like others of my generation, I felt like an *orphan in history,* (to use Paul Cowan's phrase), cut off from rituals that bound and informed generations of Jews. But the more I explored the word *orphan,* the more I began to understand its paradox. To be an orphan in exile was a *permanent* condition of my tribe! I was not in exile alone. I was in exile among exiles. Home among the homeless.

Which brings me to now. Where am I?

I have begun to celebrate Jewish rituals and holidays, to take my part in a Jewish community. I combine this with Buddhist practices which remind me of open space, lightness and letting go. I still meditate regularly, and practice the discipline to see things simply, as they are.

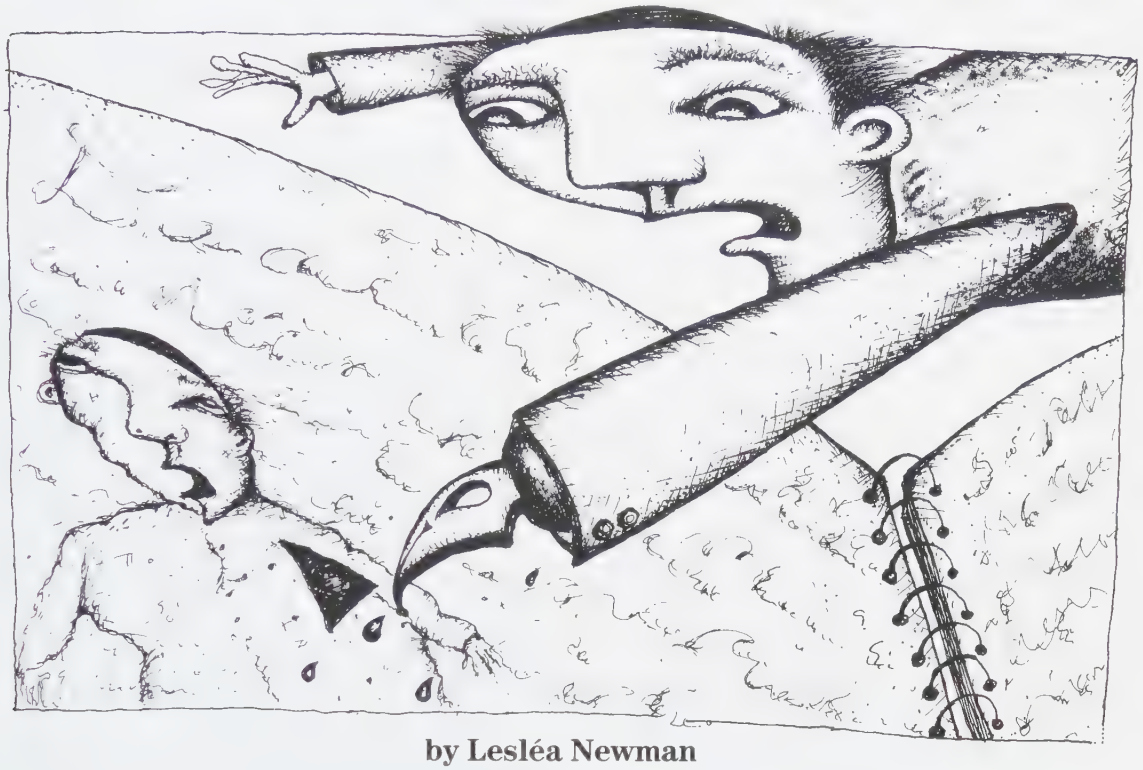
And I dance. By myself. With others. When I work therapeutically with groups. Sometimes as did my Chassidic relatives, I just let the soul and joy move through my body. Sometimes I use Jewish or meditative forms more intentionally. I work with groups of women from all traditions who are homesick to recover their spiritual roots. Together we remember songs taught to us by our mothers and grandmothers, wisdom handed down to us orally.

I now know what is implied in all the good quest stories, where spiritual warriors like Odysseus or Zen monks must go *through* their various searches in order to arrive, finally, right back home again. And although I still believe strongly in the value of questions, my own spiritual journey is now simpler, more intimate. No longer "out there" in the form of the "right" teacher, practice or group; it is instead "inside" of me. The questions that tortured me have fallen away. No culture, faith or spiritual model is perfect, and what I understand now is that it needn't be. ❑

Ilene Serlin *is currently on staff at Saybrook Institute in San Francisco. She has taught at UCLA and worked at the House of Affirmation in Boston. She is on the board of directors of the Association of Mental Health Affliation With Israel.*

A LETTER TO HARVEY MILK

for Harvey Milk 1930-1978



by Lesléa Newman

The teacher says we should write about our life, everything that happened today. So *nu*, what's there to tell? Why should today be different than any other day? May 5, 1986. I get up. I have myself a coffee, a little cottage cheese, half an English muffin. I get dressed. I straighten up the house a little, nobody should drop by and see I'm such a slob. I go down to the Senior Center and see what's doing. I play a little cards, I have some lunch, a bagel with cheese. I read a sign in the cafeteria, Writing Class 2:00. I think to myself, why not, something to pass the time. So at two o'clock I go in. The teacher says we should write about our life.

Listen, I want to say to this teacher, I.B. Singer I'm not. You think anybody cares what I did all day? Even my own children, may they live and be well, don't call. You think the whole world is waiting to see what Harry Weinberg had for breakfast?

So, after the class I go to the store, I pick myself up a little orange juice, a few bagels, a nice piece of chicken, I shouldn't starve to death. I go up, I put on my slippers, I eat the chicken. I watch a little TV, I write in this notebook, I get ready for bed. *Nu*, for this somebody should give me a Pulitzer Prize?

Today the teacher tells us something about herself. She's a Jew, this we know from the *Mogen David* she wears around her neck. She tells us she wants to collect stories from old Jewish people, to preserve our history. *Oy*, such stories that I could tell her, shouldn't be preserved by nobody. She tells us she's learning Yiddish. For what, I wonder. I can't figure this teacher out. She's young, she's pretty, she shouldn't be with the old people so much. I wonder is she married. She doesn't wear a ring. Her grandparents won't tell her stories, she says, and she's worried that the Jews her age won't know nothing about the culture, about life in the *shtetls*. Believe me, life in the *shtetl* is nothing worth knowing about. Hunger and more hunger. Better off we're here in America, the past is past.

Then she gives us our homework, the homework we write in the class, it's a little *meshugeh*, but alright. She wants us to write a letter to somebody from our past, somebody who's no longer with us.

I sit for a few minutes, thinking about Fannie, thinking about my sister Frieda, my mother, my father, may they all rest in peace. But it's the strangest thing, the one I really want to write to is Harvey.

Dear Harvey:

You had to go get yourself killed for being a *faygeleh?* You couldn't let somebody else have such a great honor? Alright, alright, so you liked the boys, I wasn't wild about the idea. But I got used to it. I never said you wasn't welcome in my house, did I?

Nu, Harvey, you couldn't leave well enough alone? You had your own camera store, your own business, what's bad? You couldn't keep still about the boys, you weren't satisfied until the whole world knew? Harvey Milk, with the big ears and the big ideas, had to go make himself something, a big politician. I know, I know, I said, "Harvey, make something of yourself, don't be an old *shmegeggie* like me, Harry the butcher." So now I'm eating my words, and they stick like a chicken bone in my old throat.

It's a rotten world, Harvey, and rottener still without you in it. You know what happened to that *momzer*, Dan White? They let him out of jail, and he goes and kills himself so nobody else should have the pleasure. Now you know me, Harvey, I'm not a violent man. But this was too much, even for me. In the old country, I saw things you shouldn't know from, things you couldn't imagine one person could do to another. But here in America, a man climbs through the window, kills the Mayor of San Francisco, kills Harvey Milk, and a couple years later he's walking around on the street? This I never thought I'd see in my whole life. But from a country that kills the Rosenbergs, I should expect something different?

Harvey, you should be glad you weren't around for the trial. I read about it in the papers. The lawyer, that son of a bitch, said Dan White ate too many Twinkies the night before he killed you, so his brain wasn't working right. Twinkies, *nu*, I ask you. My kids ate Twinkies when they were little, did they grow up to be murderers, God forbid? And now, do they take the Twinkies down from the shelf, somebody else shouldn't go a little crazy, climb through a window, and shoot somebody? No, they leave them right there next to the cupcakes and the donuts, to torture me every time I go to the store to pick up a few things.

Harvey, I think I'm losing my mind. You know what I do every week? Every week I go to the store, I buy a bag of jellybeans for you, you should have something to *nosh* on. I remember what a sweet tooth you have. I put them in a jar on the table, in case you should come in with another crazy petition for me to sign. Sometimes I think you're gonna just walk through my door and tell me it was another *meshugeh* publicity stunt.

Harvey, now I'm gonna tell you something. The night you died the whole city of San Francisco cried for you. Thirty thousand people marched in the street, I saw it on TV. Me, I didn't go down. I'm an old man, I don't walk so good, they said there might be riots. But no, there were no riots. Just people walking in the street, quiet, each one with a candle, until the street looked like the sky all lit up with a million stars. Old people, young people, Black people, white people, Chinese people. You name it, they were there. I remember thinking, Harvey must be so proud, and then I remembered you were dead and such a lump rose in my throat, like a grapefruit it was, and then the tears ran down my face like rain. Can you imagine, Harvey, an old man like me, sitting alone in his apartment, crying and carrying on like a baby? But it's the God's truth. Never did I carry on so.

And then all of a sudden I got mad. I yelled at the people on TV: for getting shot you made him into such a hero? You couldn't march for him when he was alive, he couldn't *shep* a little *naches*?

But *nu*, what good does getting mad do, it only makes my pressure go up. So I took myself a pill, calmed myself down.

Then they made speeches for you, Harvey. The same people who called you a *shmuck* when you were alive, now you were dead, they were calling you a *mensh*. You were a *mensh*, Harvey a *mensh* with a heart of gold.You were too good for this rotten world. They just weren't ready for you.

Oy Harveleh, alav ha-sholom,
Harry

Today the teacher asks me to stay for a minute after class. *Oy*, what did I do wrong now, I wonder. Maybe she didn't like my letter to Harvey? Who knows?

After the class she comes and sits down next to me. She's wearing purple pants and a white T-shirt. *"Feh,"* I can just hear Fannie say, "God forbid she should wear a skirt? Show off her figure a little? The girls today dressing like boys and the boys dressing like girls – this I don't understand."

"Mr. Weinberg," the teacher says.

"Call me Harry," I says.

"O.K., Harry," she says. "I really liked the letter you wrote to Harvey Milk. It was terrific, really. It meant a lot to me. It even made me cry."

I can't even believe my own ears. My letter to Harvey Milk made the teacher cry?

"You see, Harry," she says, "I'm gay, too. And there aren't many Jewish people your age that are so open-minded. At least that I know. Then she says, "Tell me about Harvey Milk. How did you meet him? What was he like?" *Nu*, Harvey, you were a pain in the ass when you were alive, you're still a pain in the ass now that you're dead. Everybody wants to hear about Harvey.

So I tell her. I tell her how I came into the camera shop one day with a roll of film from when I went to visit the grandchildren. How we started talking, and I said, "Milk, that's not such a common name. Are you related to the Milks in Woodmere?" And so we found out we were practically neighbors forty years ago, when the children were young, before we moved out here.

I tell her more about Harvey, how he didn't believe there was a good *kosher* butcher in San Francisco, how he came to my store just to see. But all the time I'm talking I'm thinking to myself, no, it can't be true. Such a gorgeous girl like this goes with the girls, not with the boys? Such a *shanda*. Didn't God in His wisdom make a girl a girl and a boy a boy – boom they should meet, boom they should get married, boom they should have babies, and that's the way it is? Harvey I loved like my own son, but this I never could understand. And *nu*, why was the teacher telling me this, it's my business who she sleeps with? She has some sadness in her eyes, this teacher. Believe me I've known such sadness in my life, I can recognize it a hundred miles away. Maybe she's lonely. Maybe after class one day I'll take her out for a coffee, we'll talk a little bit, I'll find out.

After the class I waited till everybody left, they shouldn't get the wrong idea, and I asked the teacher would she like to go get a coffee. "*Nu*, it's enough writing already," I said. "Come, let's have a little treat."

So we take a walk, it's a nice day. We find a diner, nothing fancy, but clean and quiet. I try to buy her a piece of cake, a sandwich maybe, but no, all she wants is coffee.

I took a swallow of my coffee, to calm down my nerves. I was getting a little too excited.

"Harry, listen to me," the teacher says. "I'm thirty years old and no one in my family will talk to me because I'm gay.

It's all Harvey Milk's fault. He made such an impression on me. You know, when he died, what he said, 'If a bullet enters my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.' So when he died, I came out to everyone — the people at work, my parents. I felt it was my duty, so the Dan Whites of the world wouldn't be able to get away with it. I mean, if every single gay person came out — just think of it! — everyone would see they had a gay friend or a gay brother or a gay cousin or a gay teacher. Then they couldn't say things like 'Those gays should be shot.' Because they'd be saying you should shoot my neighbor or my sister or my daughter's best friend."

I never saw the teacher get so excited before. Maybe a politician she should be. She reminded me a little bit of Harvey.

"So *nu*, what's the problem?" I ask.

"The problem is my parents," she says with a sigh, and such a sigh I never heard from a young person before. "My parents haven't spoken to me since I told them I was gay. 'How could you do this to us?' they said. I wasn't doing anything to them. I tried to explain I couldn't help being gay, like I couldn't help being a Jew, but that they didn't want to hear. So I haven't spoken to them in eight years."

So what can I do, I ask. Does she want me to talk to them, a letter maybe I could write. Does she want I should adopt her, the hell with them, I make a little joke. She smiles. "Just talking to you makes me feel better," she says. So *nu*, now I'm Harry the social worker. She says that's why she wants the old people's stories so much, she doesn't know nothing from her own family history. She wants to know about her own people, maybe write a book. But it's hard to get the people to talk to her, she says, she doesn't understand.

"Listen, Teacher," I tell her. "These old people have stories you shouldn't know from. What's there to tell? Hunger and more hunger. Suffering and more suffering. I buried my sister over twenty years ago, my mother, my father — all dead. You think I could just start talking about them like I just saw them yesterday? You think I don't think about them every day? Right here I keep them," I say, pointing to my heart. "I try to forget them, I should live in peace, the dead are gone. Talking about them won't bring them back. You want stories, go talk to somebody else. I ain't got no stories."

Oy, and now the teacher was crying. "I'm sorry," I says to her. "You want another coffee?"

"No thanks, Harry," she says, "I'm sorry, too."

"Forget it. We can just pretend it never happened," I say, and then we go.

Today after the writing class, the teacher tells us she's going away for two days. Everyone makes a big fuss, the class they like so much already. She tells us she's sorry, something came up she has to do. She says we can come have class without her, the room will be open, we can read to each other what we write in our notebooks. Someone asks her what we should write about.

"Write me a letter," she says. "Write a story called "What I Never Told Anyone."

So, after everyone leaves, I ask her does she want to go out, have a coffee, but she says no, she has to go home and pack.

I tell her wherever she's going she should have a good time.

"Thanks, Harry," she says. "You'll be here when I get back?"

"Sure," I tell her. "I like this crazy writing. It passes the time."

She swings a big black bookbag onto her shoulder, a regular Hercules this teacher is, and she smiles at me. "I gotta run, Harry. Have a good week." She turns and walks away and something on her bookbag catches my eye. A big shiny pin that spells out her name all fancy-shmancy in rhinestones: Barbara. And under that, right away I see sewn onto her bookbag an upside-down pink triangle.

I stop in my tracks, stunned. No, it can't be, I says to myself. Maybe it's just a design? Maybe she doesn't know from this? My heart is beating fast now, I know I should go home, take myself a pill, my pressure, I can feel it going up.

But I just stand there. And then I get mad. What, she thinks maybe I'm blind as well as old, I can't see what's right in front of my nose? Or maybe we don't remember such things? What right does she have to walk in here with that, that thing on her bag, to remind us of what we been through? Haven't we seen enough?

Stories she wants. She wants we should cut our hearts open and give her stories so she could write a book. Well, alright, now I'll tell her a story.

This is what I never told anyone. One day, maybe seven, eight years ago — no, maybe longer, I think Harvey was still alive — one day Izzie comes knocking on my door. I open the door and there's Izzie, standing there, his face white as a sheet. I bring him inside, I make him a coffee. "Izzie, what is it," I says to him. "Something happened to the children, to the grandchildren, God forbid?"

He sits down, he doesn't drink his coffee. He looks through me like I'm not even there. Then he says, "Harry, I'm walking down the street, you know I had a little lunch at the Center, and then I come outside, I see a young man, maybe twenty-five, a good-looking guy, walking toward me. He's wearing black pants, a white shirt, and on his shirt he's got a pink triangle."

"So," I says, "A pink triangle, a purple triangle, they wear all kinds of crazy things these days."

"*Heshel*," he tells me, "don't you understand? The gays are wearing pink triangles just like the war, just like in the camps."

No, this I can't believe. Why would they do a thing like that? But if Izzie says it, it must be true. Who would make up such a thing?

"Listen, *Heshel*, I got to tell you something, something I never told nobody in my whole life. I was young in the camps, nineteen, maybe twenty when they took us away." The words poured from his mouth like a flood. "*Yussl* was my best friend in the camps. Already I saw my mother, my father, my Hannah marched off to the ovens. *Yussl* was the only one I had to hold on to.

"One morning, during the selection, they pointed me to the right, *Yussl* to the left. I went a little crazy, I ran after him. 'No, he stays with me, they made a mistake,' I said, and I grabbed him by the hand and dragged him back in line. Why the guard didn't kill us right then, I couldn't tell you. Nothing made sense in that place.

"*Yussl* and I slept together on a wooden bench. That night I couldn't sleep. It happened pretty often in that place. I would close my eyes and see such things that would make me scream in the night, and for that I could get shot. I don't know what was worse, asleep or awake. All I saw was suffering.

"On this night, *Yussl* was awake, too. He didn't move a

muscle, but I could tell. Finally he said my name, just a whisper, but something broke in me and I began to cry. He put his arms around me and we cried together, such a close call we'd had.

"And then he began to kiss me. 'You saved my life,' he whispered, and he kissed my eyes, my cheeks, my lips. And Harry, I kissed him back. Harry, I never told nobody this before, I, we...we, you know, that was such a place that hell, I couldn't help it. The warmth of his body was just too much for me and Hannah was dead already and we would soon be dead too, probably, so what did it matter?"

He looked up at me then, the tears streaming from his eyes. "It's O.K., Izzie," I said. "Maybe I would have done the same."

"There's more, Harry," he says, and I got him a tissue, he should blow his nose. What more could there be?

"This went on for a couple of months maybe, just every once in a while when we couldn't sleep. He'd whisper my name and I'd answer with his, and then we'd, you know, we'd touch each other. We were very, very quiet, but who knows, maybe some other boys in the barracks were doing the same.

"To this day I don't know how it happened, but somehow someone found out. One day *Yussl* didn't come back to the barracks at night. I went almost crazy, you can imagine, all the things that went through my mind, the things they might have done to him, those lousy Nazis. I looked everywhere, I asked everyone, three days he was gone. And then on the third day, they lined us up after supper and there they had *Yussl*. I almost collapsed on the ground when I saw him. They had him on his knees with his hands tied behind his back. His face was swollen so, you couldn't even see his eyes. His clothes were stained with blood. And on his uniform they had sewn a pink triangle, big, twice the size of our yellow stars.

"*Oy*, did they beat him but good. 'Who's your friend?' they yelled at him. 'Tell us and we'll let you live.' But no, he wouldn't tell. He knew they were lying, he knew they'd kill us both. They asked him again and again, 'Who's your friend? Tell us which one he is.' And every time he said no, they'd crack him with a whip until the blood ran from him like a river. Such a sight he was, like I've never seen. How he remained conscious I'll never know.

"Everything inside me was broken after that. I wanted to run to his side, but I didn't dare, so afraid I was. At one point he looked at me, right in the eye, as though he was saying, *Izzie, save yourself. Me, I'm finished, but you, you got a chance to live through this and tell the world our story.*

"Right after he looked at me, he collapsed, and they shot him, Harry, right there in front of us. Even after he was dead they kicked him in the head a little bit. They left his body out there for two days, as a warning to us. They whipped us all that night, and from then on we had to sleep with all the lights on and with our hands on top of the blankets. Anyone caught with their hands under the blankets would be shot.

"He died for me, Harry, they killed him for that, was it such a terrible thing? *Oy*, I haven't thought about *Yussl* for twenty-five years maybe, but when I saw that kid on the street today, it was too much." And then he started crying again, and he clung to me like a child.

So what could I do? I was afraid he shouldn't have a heart attack, maybe he was having a nervous breakdown, maybe I should get the doctor. *Vay iss mir*, I never saw anybody so upset in my whole life. And such a story, *Gottenyu*.

"Izzie, come lie down," I says, and I took him by the hand to the bed. I laid him down, I took off his shoes, and still he was crying. So what could I do? I lay down with him, I held him tight. I told him he was safe, he was in America. I don't know what else I said, I don't think he heard me, still he kept crying.

I stroked his head, I held him tight. "Izzie, it's alright," I said. "Izzie, Izzie, *Izzaleh*." I said his name over and over, like a lullaby, until his crying got quiet. He said my name once softly, *Heshel*, or maybe he said *Yussl*, I don't remember, but thank God he finally fell asleep. I tried to get up from the bed, but Izzie held onto me tight. So what could I do? Izzie was my friend for thirty years, for him I would do anything. So I held him all night long, and he slept like a baby.

And this is what I never told nobody, not even Harvey. That there in that bed, where Fannie and I slept together for forty-two years, me and Izzie spent the night. Me, I didn't sleep a wink, such a lump in my throat I had, like the night Harvey died.

Izzie passed on a couple months after that. I saw him a few more times, and he seemed different somehow. How, I couldn't say. We never talked about that night. But now that he had told someone his deepest secret, he was ready to go, he could die in peace. Maybe now that I told, I can die in peace, too?

Dear Teacher:

You said write what you never told nobody, and write you a letter. I always did all my homework, such a student I was. So *nu*, I got to tell you something. I can't write in this notebook no more. I can't come no more to the class. I don't want you should take offense, you're a good teacher and a nice girl. But me, I'm an old man. I don't sleep so good at night, these stories are like a knife in my heart. Harvey, Fannie, Izzie, *Yussl*, my father, my mother, let them all rest in peace. The dead are gone. Better to live for today. What good does remembering do, it doesn't bring back the dead. Let them rest in peace.

But Teacher, I want you should have my notebook. It doesn't have nice stories in it, no love letters, no happy endings for a nice girl like you. A bestseller it ain't, I guarantee. Maybe you'll put it in a book someday, the world shouldn't forget.

Meanwhile, good luck to you, Teacher. May you live and be well and not get shot in the head like poor Harvey, may he rest in peace. Maybe someday we'll go out, have a coffee again, who knows? But me, I'm too old for this crazy writing. I remember too much, the pen is like a knife twisting in my heart.

One more thing, Teacher. Between parents and children, it's not so easy. Believe me, I know. Don't give up on them. One father, one mother, it's all you got. If you were my *tochter*, I'd be proud of you.

Harry

© *Lesléa Newman, 1988. Excerpted with permission from* A Letter to Harvey Milk *(Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1988).* *In addition to teaching women's writing workshops called "Write From the Heart,"* ***Lesléa Newman*** *teaches writing workshops for Jewish women called "Generating Memories/Remembering Generations."*

A FEMINIST CONFRONTS HER IDENTITY IN GERMANY

by Alice Ginsberg

Alice Ginsberg

Dachau 1987

This past fall I was the graduate assistant for a women's studies program in Europe. Of the twenty students on the program, seven of us were Jewish. Odd as it now seems to me, it actually had not crossed my mind that my Judaism – or that different sensitivities around the issue of anti-Semitism – might become a source of tension for the group.

In my naivete, I was simply enthralled by the prospect of spending three full months solely in the company of other feminists; it would be, I imagined, Utopia. And though I had thought a lot about the issues that might be confronting the one Black woman and the lesbians in our group, the truth is I hadn't thought much about what might segregate us out as Jews. So it was almost entirely without warning that issues of Judaism and anti-Semitism irreconcilably split us apart. And for the first time in my life, I felt a real and painful conflict between my Judaism and my feminism.

It was during our three weeks in Germany, of course, that all of this came to a head. Now that I think of it, actually we got a foreshadowing of our "otherness" during our orientation in a convent in the Netherlands. There were crucifixes over our beds, but none of us Jewish women discussed our discomfort with this – even though one of us surreptitiously removed her crucifix and stuck it in a bottom drawer.

In a sense then, the trip started off with unexamined issues and biases. As opposed to the other countries we visited – the Netherlands, Yugoslavia and Great Britain – Germany was a place that those of us who were Jewish had been taught to fear on some level from a very young age. I remember, for example, as a ten-year-old traveling through Germany – not to visit it, God forbid, just to get to the other side – that my father refused to stop and buy gas; he didn't want to put money into the German economy.

Another Jewish woman on the program told us how her father balked when she had to fill out a passport form for Germany that asked her religion. "Put non-denominational," he counselled. He also told her not to wear her Jewish star necklace while in Germany. But not until I actually set foot in Germany as an adult did I realize that I'd internalized these concerns. I felt an odd, irrational kind of fear . . . as if I myself were in danger. German passport police on the trains made me jump. On the other hand, my feminist activism had taught me not to give in to these feelings: Ask questions! Speak out! By refusing to be silent we conquer oppression. Of this I felt assured.

At our first stop at a feminist therapy center in Munich, I found myself asking German feminists about their outreach to Jewish women. I was utterly surprised by my own question and by how much my heart was pounding as I asked it. As the German therapists uncomfortably mumbled something about how there aren't many Jews left in Germany, many of the Christian women in our program looked around, ill-at-ease.

At a group meeting the next day, some of the Christian women felt strongly that our questions had been unacceptable. "We're their *guests*," one woman said. "Be polite. Don't put the Germans in an uncomfortable position." We were distressed by this advice. I flashed to scenes of the Holocaust, as if it were *visibly* still going on, being told by other women "don't ask questions." Here we were in Germany, twenty feminists, and believe me we

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were asking a lot of questions: What about Black women? What about lesbian women? What about poor women? What about foreign women . . . ? Hey, why weren't *Jewish* women on the agenda?

There was a sense that with the Holocaust over, so too was anti-Semitism. This was the first time I began to sense that the Jewish women on the program had come to Germany with something of a distinct set of issues. We *had* to ask German women these questions. It was not a matter of making the Germans uncomfortable, but of challenging our own invisibility and the silences surrounding our history in this country.

By the time it came round to visiting Dachau concentration camp, I approached the other Jewish women on the program about our going separately from the Christians in the group. I felt that being with other Jews would allow me to be myself emotionally without inhibition. Three other Jewish women chose to go with me, three did not. We pinned yellow Jewish stars to our sweaters, but they were very small stars — such was our discomfort and confusion! I felt very strange wearing a Jewish star — I had never worn one at home. I felt suddenly for the first time *re*actively as opposed to actively Jewish.

> There were crucifixes over our beds, but none of us discussed our discomfort — though one of us surreptitiously removed hers.

That evening, after everybody had visited Dachau, we had a group meeting which was explosive. It was as if the Jewish women and the Christian women had spent the day at two entirely different sites: What the Jews saw was this huge, horribly incongruous crucifix in the middle of the camp. We saw a church to the left of the crucifix and a convent of nuns living on the grounds of the camp. We angrily held up the Dachau tourist brochure given out at the front gates, quoting from it: "Whether you seek relaxation in art or prefer active recreation in the magnificent outdoor swimming pool, Dachau will always suit you."

We felt betrayed. We had expected it to be a sharp reminder of what had happened to our ancestors, but it had an almost complete lack of Jewish symbols. The monuments read blandly, "to those who were executed here." But our indignation was met with silence and puzzlement. What the non-Jews had experienced was catharsis, a chance to understand and sympathize with our persecution. Besides, they pointed out to us Jews, many other people besides Jews were killed at the camp, "Why do you insist so much on recognition of *your* loss?"

By the next day it was clear that many of the non-Jewish women felt that we Jews had overreacted, that our anger had made us "unapproachable." They felt unfairly criticized; unsure of how to support us; that we were asking too much of them. We, in turn, felt distinctly "other." We began to function as an outgroup. And suddenly I felt scared. Were they right? Was I oversensitive? I felt afraid of people being angry at me. If I estrange myself from a feminist group, who else is there to turn to? Where does it leave me?

I felt frightened, also, by my own anger. It was as if I left on the program wearing a woman's symbol and returned with it broken — and in its place a Jewish star. But there is a difference, for me, between the women's symbol and the star. The women's symbol had been an affirmation: "I love women! I want to celebrate women!" But the Jewish star... I'm not sure. I came into my Judaism in a different way, and I'm still not sure what it means to me to wear it.

I would like to end this article by saying that we worked everything out, that at the end of the program we resolved our differences and shared that feminist solidarity I was so looking forward to. But I cannot write this because it isn't true. We left each other with scars. Really big ones.

Alice Ginsberg *is a freelance writer living in Brooklyn who specializes in feminist topics.*

9 Issues for the 90's

(Continued from Page 9)

Miriam Weinstein

of activists who meet once a week, wearing black, in a public place in Jerusalem. There are sister groups in the U.S. One, the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation conducts vigils weekly with members, including Irena Klepfisz and Grace Paley.

Contact Clare Kinberg, The Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation, 163 Joralemon St. Ste. 1178, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Coalition Building

During the 1988 New York State Democratic primary, Black-Jewish relations sank to an all-time low. New York City Mayor Ed Koch, a Jew, stated publicly that Jews and other lovers of Israel would be "crazy" to vote for Jackson, who, in 1984, referred to New York City as "Hymietown." Could Blacks and Jews ever repair the damage?

According to Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women, the key to better Black-Jewish relations is to work on common projects that will "show us how much we have in common. I'm not saying that the plight of Blacks is the same as that of Jews, but there are similarities and ways to understand. Where Blacks and Jews have worked together – on civil rights, women's rights, human rights – the people involved have reached that understanding."

Height urges Jewish women to "get involved in schools and on community projects where you will meet and deal with Black women. You will find that people are not exactly the way you might have thought they'd be."

Height and the council have worked very closely with Hadassah and National Council of Jewish Women for years on a number of projects, through which Height has developed the theory that much of Black-Jewish misunderstanding comes from a religious, not cultural or racial difference.

Contact the American Jewish Committee National Interreligious Task Force on Black-Jewish Relations, 165 E. 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Elder Care

By the year 2020, there will be 50 million Americans over the age of 65. Because women have a longer life-span than men, more than half of those people will be female. What can be done to address their needs?

Vivian Erlich, executive director of Project Dorot, an organization created to link young adults and the urban elderly, says: "There has been increased funding for emergency support, but for people who have no emergency need, there is nothing. What legislators don't understand – or don't act upon – is that for the elderly life is a series of emergencies." Take food preparation, for example. Many of the elderly are well enough to live alone, but not well enough to shop and cook for themselves. "So far, there is no food delivery program that works."

But the problems go further. "Human beings are more than just individuals needing medical support," Erlich says. "We need to find a way to reach them emotionally, to draw them into the community." One of her special projects: conference calls in which elders can take part in discussions with others – young and old – in their community. To do this, young people must be made aware of their responsibility. Senator Sam Nunn is considering giving college students course credits to be volunteers to the elderly; some organizations are considering paying their volunteers a nominal fee to make the work more appealing.

On the positive side, Erlich notes that young Jewish families have recently been taking an interest in the problems of the elderly. "A lot of parents want to expose their children to social issues and this is one way to start."

Contact the Jewish Association of Services for the Aged, 40 W. 68th St., New York, NY 10023; Project Dorot, 262 W. 91st St., New York, NY 10024. ❑

KOL ISHAH

(Continued from Page 5)

ARTISTS' RETREATS ENCOURAGE PEACE

A small violin lay in its brown case in a hotel room in New York City. The violin, destined for an Ethiopian boy who is learning to play the violin in Israel, was donated to a unique education program in Israel created by a woman dedicated both to the arts and to peace.

The program, called Hilai, sponsors two retreat houses for artists, one in the Galilee town of Ma'alot-Tarshiha – a twin Arab/Jewish town – and the other in the Negev town of Mitzpe Rimon.

Started by Corinna (she uses only her first name), Hilai's primary purpose is to provide a constructive atmosphere in which artists can work. No less important, however, are the benefits to the host community. Each artist is asked to contribute to the community by teaching and/or by creating a work of art.

Courtesy Hilai

American Susan Moinester teaching Suzuki method.

Each artist gets a studio apartment with work and living space. The guest is not obliged to contribute anything but his or her creativity during a three-month stay at the village.

This policy has led to more than 200 activities, such as creative writing, painting and music workshops including concerts and exhibitions that bring together Arab and Jewish members of the community.

"Hilai is very revolutionary," said Corinna, who is herself a writer. Hilai, a non-profit organization, is a "place for an artist to create in tranquility and be accepted as a working person with a lot of appreciation and a lot of love. We say the artist and the community need each other very much – and every person is a potential artist."

– Toby Axelrod

MAZEL TOV

Marion Ungar Davis of Pittsburgh has been elected the first woman president of the Pittsburgh Zionist District, one of the largest membership districts of the Zionist Organization of America.

Mitzi Gitlin was elected president of Temple Beth Shalom, Long Beach, California.

Sandi Goldstein was named executive director of Long Beach and Greater Western Orange County Jewish Federation.

Sue Kohn will become campaign director of the Associated Jewish Charities and Welfare Fund in Baltimore in January 1989.

Rabbi Stacy Offner was recently chosen by The Committee for a New Reform Congregation of St. Paul, Minnesota to become their new rabbi, one of the few women rabbis to hold the chief synagogue position. This is the first time that an American congregation has knowingly chosen a lesbian as its rabbi.

Cynthia Ozick, whose work LILITH has been proud to publish on two occasions, has been inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her most recent book is the novel, *The Messiah of Stockholm* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

Judy Roskow has been appointed campaign director of the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh.

Amy M. Schnupp, a senior in high school in Canton, Ohio, was presented with the first prize in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council's 1988 National Writing Contest. Her winning poem was entitled "Some Kind of Peace."

Sharon Shenhav, director of legal services for NA'AMAT in Jerusalem, recently received an award from the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel for promoting recognition of the rights of women to be equal participants in all bodies and agencies in Israel, for her educational and informational lectures to women's groups, and for providing, through NA'AMAT Israel, free legal services.

WOMEN PROTEST ISRAELI OCCUPATION

Women in Black and Women for Women Political Prisoners are two Israeli-based groups working to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Women in Black organizes weekly vigils in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to protest the Israeli government actions against the Palestinians. Women for Women Political Prisoners, founded in May, assists Palestinian prisoners and their families, as well as working to raise the Israeli public's consciousness regarding the Palestinian plight.

Since December 1987, over 5,000 Palestinians have been detained under administrative detention orders. As of July, there were 28 Palestinian women and two Israeli Jewish women who are being held in Israeli jails, according to Shoshanna Kahn, a member of Women for Women Political Prisoners.

Ranging in age from 15 to 65, they are either under administrative detention, "suspected without charge" or pretrial for participating in demonstrations, stone throwing and incitement. The two Jewish women, editors of *Derech HaNitzoz*, a recently

closed leftist newspaper, have been accused of receiving funding from a faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Women for Women Political Prisoners keeps an updated list of women political prisoners. Each prisoner is "adopted" by a member of the group whose responsiblities include bringing weekly packages to the prisoner, contacting her family and being present as an observer at any hearings or trials, according to Kahn. Upon release, the women in the group meet the prisoner at the prison gate, ensure that she arrives home safely and maintain ties with her.

Also, in New York, the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation has been staging weekly protests in front of the Jewish Agency building on Park Avenue, calling on leaders of the American Jewish community to work for peace in the Middle East.

– Shelley Sella

PATERNITY LEAVE CHALLENGED

The Federal Court of Canada has ruled that the Canadian Unemployment Insurance Act discriminates against natural parents. In a suit brought by Shalom Schacter of Toronto, the justice found that the act denies natural parents the choice available to adoptive parents – that either parent may stay home with a new child and collect unemployment insurance benefits for 15 weeks.

Schacter, a lawyer and arbitration officer for a union, hailed the decision, stating: "I feel vindicated in my views of how fathers can take a greater role in the family and not just be breadwinners." He challenged the law after he took three weeks off following the birth of his second son in July 1985 so that his wife could go back to work. He told the Federal Court that he and his wife, Marcia Gilbert, had an egalitarian marriage and shared parental responsibilities. ❑

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